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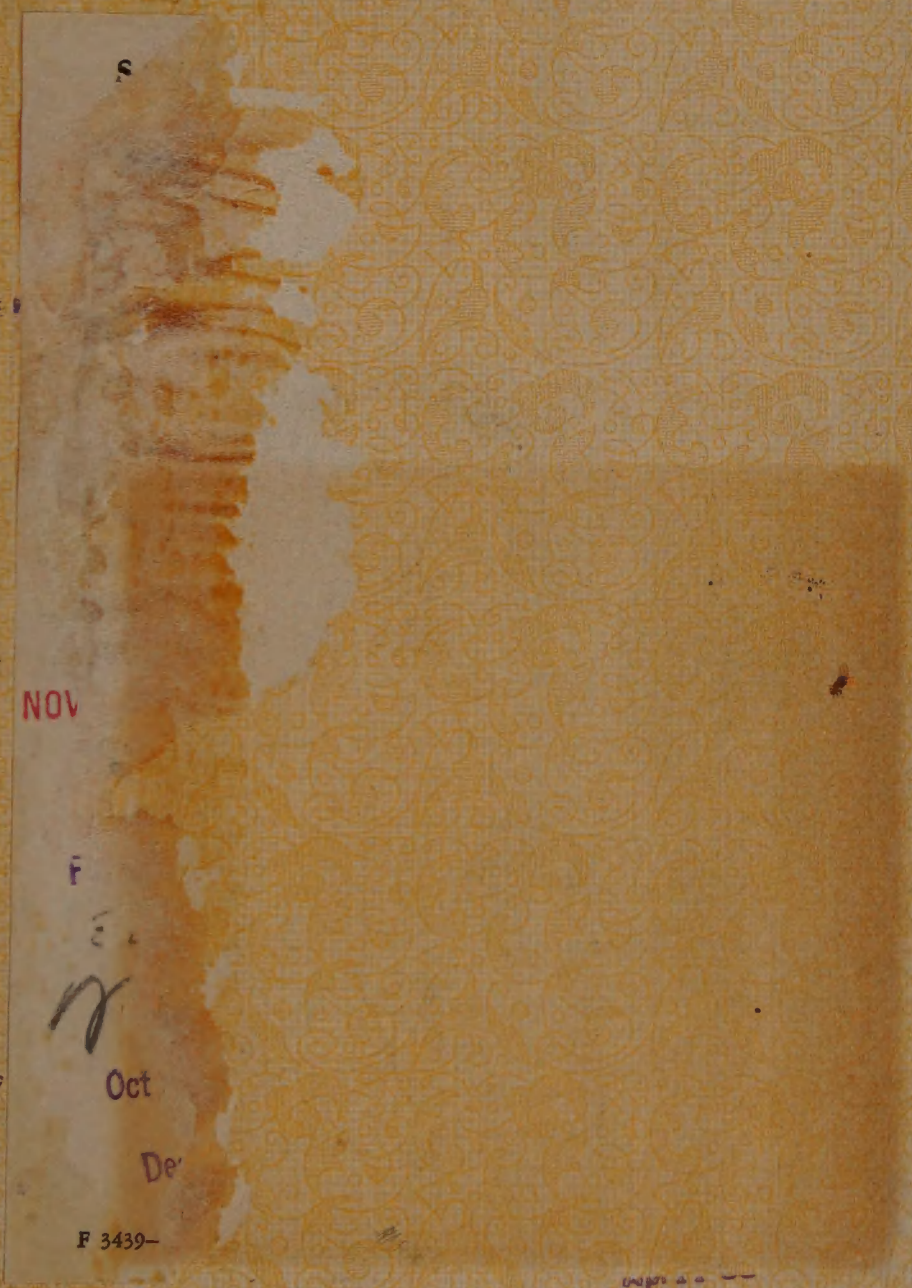
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*Mary & Charles Lamb*

*from the painting by F. S. Cary in 1834.*

# THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB

BY

E. V. LUCAS

IN TWO VOLUMES

WITH FIFTY ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME I

1775-1817

SECOND EDITION

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# PREFACE

THIS is, I think, the first attempt that has been made since Talfourd's day to write the life of Charles and Mary Lamb in full. The charming volume contributed by the late Canon Ainger to the "English Men of Letters" series was rather in the nature of a monograph than a biography; and the same may be said of Barry Cornwall's brief and beautifully sympathetic *Charles Lamb: A Memoir*, and of Mrs. Gilchrist's very kindly study of Mary Lamb in the "Eminent Women" series. Mr. Percy Fitzgerald's *Charles Lamb: His Friends, his Haunts, and his Books* and *In the Footprints of Charles Lamb*, by Mr. B. E. Martin, an American writer, were constructed on an easier plan; the admirably concentrated biographical introduction by Mr. William Macdonald, in his edition of Lamb's works, is critical before all things; while Mr. W. Carew Hazlitt's *Mary and Charles Lamb* and *The Lambs*, and Mr. Bertram Dobell's *Sidelights on Charles Lamb*—all invaluable to workers in the same field—do not aim at completeness.

The new material that has come to light since the publication of Talfourd's *Final Memorials* alone would justify a new biography, apart from the removal, by the lapse of time, of many of the restrictions which prevented Lamb's first biographer from quoting as freely from the letters as he might have wished, and from entering fully into all the particulars of his friend's life and friendships.

As the years have passed on, and Lamb, who "wrote for antiquity," has become more and more a treasured writer by posterity, the desire to learn of him and his sister all that can be learned—a desire prompted not by curiosity but by affection—has steadily increased; and the reply to this wish has been

such that in all literature there is no figure, save perhaps Johnson, whom we know so well, and certainly none that is better loved.

It has been my aim to collect and fuse into a single narrative the sum of this scattered information. As in carrying out that task I have tried as far as possible to keep the story of Lamb's life in his own and his sister's words and in those of their contemporaries, my part will be found to be less that of author than of stage-manager. Thanks to the good sense of the Lambs' friends in preserving their letters, and to Lamb's own inveterate habit of autobiography ("the more my character comes to be known," he wrote, "the less will my veracity come to be suspected"), the task has not been a very difficult one; yet it would have been far more so but for certain of the predecessors whom I have named, and for the kindness of the Trustees of the Dr. Williams' Library, who have permitted me to transcribe whatever I wished from the original MS. of Crabb Robinson's *Diary*.

One of the most interesting of the illustrations is the drawing of Lamb, Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, by Thornton Leigh Hunt, opposite page 232 of Vol. II., which I owe to the courtesy of Mrs. Shelley Leigh-Hunt. Many other portraits I should have liked to include, but it was not possible. There is, for example, no portrait known of Thomas Manning, nor of Godwin's friend Marshall, "the man who went to sleep when the 'Ancient Mariner' was reading," nor of the redoubtable John Fenwick, the Bigod of *Elia*. But the head of Samuel Salt, modelled in wax by Charles Lamb's father, kindly lent me by Miss Roscow, to some extent makes up for these omissions.

At the end of the second volume will be found a series of four appendices, containing a note on the portraits of Lamb, a reprint of the *Poetical Pieces* of John Lamb, senior, and an account of Lamb's principal Commonplace Book and of his library; while it might be well to say in this place that the Index, which is largely the work of my friend Miss M. C. G. Jackson, contains a chronological table of Charles Lamb's life.

I feel that a word is needed concerning our national disregard of Charles and Mary Lamb's memory. The grave where they lie, in Edmonton churchyard, a drawing of which will be

found opposite page 288 of Vol. II., has occasionally been allowed to fall into a deplorable state. Private piety has twice restored the stone; and at the present moment the flowers are in the care of certain persons who are not likely to allow neglect again to reign; but one would like to think that the nation charged itself with some little office for this brother and sister.

The only public memorial to Lamb—the joint tablet to Cowper, Keats, and himself, in Edmonton church (Cowper's place there being due solely to the adventures of John Gilpin)—was the work of a few admirers; the English people, as a whole, have done nothing. Certain of Lamb's portraits are in the National Portrait Gallery, it is true; but Westminster Abbey knows him not; the crypt of St. Paul's, that minor subterranean Valhalla, where the national conscience is from time to time salved with busts and tablets, is ignorant of him; there is no statue in any London street; no tablet on any of his houses; no record even in the Temple, where he was born and where he lived. Had the least of the deeds of the least of that series of British Admirals for whose portraits (we are told) Charles Lamb, with characteristic humour, once sate, been his, no statue or public memorial would be wanting. As it is, a stranger to our land seeks in vain for any national expression of admiration or love for one who was at once perhaps the sweetest, sanest, and most human of English prose writers.

E. V. L.

KENSINGTON, *January*, 1905

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# THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB

## CHAPTER I

### JOHN AND ELIZABETH LAMB

Charles Lamb's Birth—The Lambs and Lincolnshire—John Lamb—"Lovel"—Elizabeth Lamb—Samuel Salt—Francis Fielde.

IN 1775, when Charles Lamb was born, Goldsmith had been dead a year, Gray and Smollett four years, Chatterton five, Sterne seven, Hogarth eleven, Richardson fourteen, Fielding twenty, Swift thirty and Pope thirty-one. In the same year Dr. Johnson was sixty-six, Garrick fifty-nine, Horace Walpole fifty-eight, Reynolds fifty-two, Burke forty-five, Sheridan twenty-four, Crabbe twenty-one, William Blake eighteen, Burns sixteen, Bowles and Cobbett thirteen, Wordsworth five, Sir Walter Scott four, Coleridge three and Southey one. Landor came into the world eleven days before Lamb, Jane Austen at the end of the same year.

The birthplace of the most lovable figure in English literature was the stronghold of English law and lawyers—the Temple. No. 2 Crown Office Row, where Charles Lamb was born on February 10th, 1775, still occupies its original position, although the row was rebuilt in 1863-64. The iron gates, dated 1730, leading to the garden opposite, are the same through which the little curious thoughtful boy must often have peered or wandered.

The Lamb family came from Lincolnshire; but we know practically nothing more of their history than is given in the sonnet on their gentle name:—

> Perchance some shepherd on Lincolnian plains,
> In manners guileless as his own sweet flocks,
> Received thee first amid the merry mocks
> And arch allusions of his fellow swains.
> Perchance from Salem's holier fields return'd,

> With glory gotten on the heads abhorr'd
> Of faithless Saracens, some martial lord
> Took HIS meek title, in whose zeal he burn'd.
> Whate'er the fount whence thy beginnings came,
> No deed of mine shall shame thee, gentle name.

In a letter to Manning in 1810, in a jesting list of titles of honour which he might choose, Lamb mentions "Baron Lamb of Stamford," adding, "Where my family came from. I have chosen that if ever I should have my choice." Although the whole passage is a joke, I think that the reference to Stamford is serious. I have not, however, been able to trace the family in or about Stamford.

I think we have a glimpse of the Lambs' grandparents in the story of Susan Yates which Charles wrote for *Mrs. Leicester's School:* "I was born [says the little girl] and brought up, in a house in which my parents had all their lives resided, which stood in the midst of that lonely tract of land called the Lincolnshire fens. Few families besides our own lived near the spot, both because it was reckoned an unwholesome air, and because its distance from any town or market made it an inconvenient situation. My father was in no very affluent circumstances, and it was a sad necessity which he was put to, of having to go many miles to fetch any thing he wanted from the nearest village, which was full seven miles distant, through a sad miry way that at all times made it heavy walking, and after rain was almost impassable. But he had no horse or carriage of his own.

"The church which belonged to the parish in which our house was situated, stood in this village; and its distance being, as I said before, seven miles from our house, made it quite an impossible thing for my mother or me to think of going to it. Sometimes indeed, on a fine dry Sunday, my father would rise early, and take a walk to the village, just to see how *goodness thrived*, as he used to say, but he would generally return tired, and the worse for his walk. It is scarcely possible to explain to any one who has not lived in the fens, what difficult and dangerous walking it is. A mile is as good as four, I have heard my father say, in those parts." These are, I think, just such recollections as John Lamb might have treasured from his early Lincolnshire days and have told his children: that is to say, for Susan's father we may perhaps read Charles Lamb's grandfather. His

joke concerning Sunday mornings is quite in the Lamb manner. The Church in the story is called St. Mary's, and there is a St. Mary's Church at Stamford.

One other glimpse of Lincolnshire's connection with the Lambs will be found in the *Elia* essay "Poor Relations," where Lamb's father and John Billet (as he styles an unidentifiable kinsman from the Mint) recall old fights between the Upper and Lower boys of Lincoln, whither John Lamb may have moved quite young, from Stamford.[1]

I fancy also that if we could know more we should find that the dark hints as to the calamity overshadowing the Clare family, in Chapter VII. of *Rosamund Gray*, were based upon a misfortune suffered by John Lamb or his father. But the time has gone by ever to unravel those sombre pages, with their almost painful sense of reality between the lines and beneath the initials and blanks.

At the time of Charles Lamb's birth the family consisted of John Lamb the father, Elizabeth Lamb the mother, Aunt "Hetty" (by baptism Sarah), John Lamb's sister, John Lamb the younger, who was born on 5th June in 1763, and Mary Anne Lamb, whom we know as Mary Lamb, born on 3rd December in 1764. There had been four other children, but all had died young. I subjoin their names from the Temple register:—

(1) ELIZABETH, born 9th January, baptised 30th January, 1762.
(2) JOHN, born 5th June, baptised 26th June, by the Rev. Mr. Dobey, 1763.
(3) MARY ANNE, born 3rd December, baptised 30th December, by the Rev. Mr. Humphreys, 1764.
(4) SAMUEL (the date of whose birth is unrecorded), baptised 13th December, 1765.
(5) ELIZABETH, born 30th August, baptised 3rd September, 1768.

[1] A number of Lambs still live in Lincolnshire, and the grave of a John and Sarah Lamb who died respectively in 1779 and 1759 is to be seen at St. Michael's on-the-Mount, but I have found it impossible to connect either living or dead with the family in the Temple. The John Lamb above was of St. Swithin's Parish, Lincoln, and his will shows him to have married again. All his property was left to his widow Catherine, unless she married again, when it was to pass to two legatees in trust for one Walter Baker. Five pounds were bequeathed to a sister Mary. Among the witnesses of the will were J. Reynolds and Richard Reynolds. The names John and Sarah, which were the names of Charles Lamb's father and aunt, the name Mary, which was the name of his sister, and the name Reynolds, which, as we shall see, was the married name of his schoolmistress, form the only evidence that these Lambs had any connection with our Lambs. But it is too slight in itself, and is practically destroyed by the worldly prosperity of the testator and the terms of his will, in which no person of the name of Lamb is mentioned.

(6) EDWARD, born 3rd September, baptised 21st September, 1770.
(7) CHARLES, born 10th February, 1775, baptised 10th March following by the Rev. Mr. Jeffs.

It would be the second little Elizabeth of whom Mary Lamb wrote in a letter to Mrs. Vincent Novello, on the death of a little daughter, in 1820: "Together with the recollection of your dear baby, the image of a little sister I once had comes as fresh into my mind as if I had seen her lately. A little cap, with white satin ribbon, grown yellow with long keeping, and a lock of light hair, were the only relics left of her. The sight of them always brought her pretty fair face to my view that to this day I seem to have a perfect recollection of her features."

John Lamb the father, in 1775, when his youngest child was born, was a little brisk man of about fifty. In the following years, as his son says in verses written in 1798,

> a merrier man,
> A man more apt to frame matter for mirth,
> Mad jokes, and antics for a Christmas eve,
> Making life social, and the laggard time
> To move on nimbly, never yet did cheer
> The little circle of domestic friends.

By profession John Lamb was a scrivener, but his principal employment for many years, until Charles was seventeen, was that of servant and assistant to Samuel Salt, a Bencher of the Inner Temple, and occupant of two sets of chambers (one for the Lambs) at 2 Crown Office Row. Of him, more a little later; but this brings us to Lamb's fullest description of his father, in the *Elia* essay on the Old Benchers, in its original form in the *London Magazine*. Lovel, says Lamb—Lovel being the name which concealed his father's identity—Lovel took absolute charge of Samuel Salt. "He was at once his clerk, his good servant, his dresser, his friend, his 'flapper,' his guide, stop-watch, auditor, treasurer." Salt "did nothing without consulting Lovel, or failed in any thing without expecting and fearing his admonishing. He put himself almost too much in his hands, had they not been the purest in the world. He resigned his title almost to respect as a master, if L. could ever have forgotten for a moment that he was a servant.

"I knew this Lovel. He was a man of an incorrigible and losing honesty. A good fellow withal, and 'would strike.' In

the cause of the oppressed he never considered inequalities, or calculated the number of his opponents. He once wrested a sword out of the hand of a man of quality that had drawn upon him; and pommelled him severely with the hilt of it. The swordsman had offered insult to a female—an occasion upon which no odds against him could have prevented the interference of Lovel. He would stand next day bare-headed to the same person, modestly to excuse his interference—for L. never forgot rank, where something better was not concerned. He pleaded the cause of a delinquent in the Treasury of the Temple so effectually with S. the then treasurer—that the man was allowed to keep his place. L. had the offer to succeed him. It had been a lucrative promotion. But L. chose to forego the advantage, because the man had a wife and family.

"L. was the liveliest little fellow breathing, had a face as gay as Garrick's, whom he was said greatly to resemble (I have a portrait of him which confirms it), possessed a fine turn for humorous poetry—next to Swift and Prior—moulded heads in clay or plaster of Paris to admiration, by the dint of natural genius merely; turned cribbage boards, and such small cabinet toys, to perfection; took a hand at quadrille or bowls with equal facility; made punch better than any man of his degree in England; had the merriest quips and conceits, and was altogether as brimful of rogueries and inventions as you could desire. He was a brother of the angle, moreover, and just such a free, hearty, honest companion as Mr. Izaac Walton would have chosen to go a-fishing with."—Such was John Lamb when his youngest son was a child and prosperity shone.

Among the books in Charles Lamb's library (now in America) are a copy of *Hudibras* and an odd volume of *The Guardian*, both of which had belonged to his father and contain his name. John Lamb left the world, moreover, a book of his own writing—*Poetical Pieces on Several Occasions*—which I have reprinted as an appendix to this work; but the quaint little collection, although valuable for what it tells us of its author's mind and career, hardly justifies the critical verdict of a too partial son. Lamb, by the way, returned to the Prior comparison a few years after the *Elia* essay. In a letter in verse to John Bates Dibdin, in 1826, he begins:—

Because you boast poetic Grandsire,
And rhyming kin, both Uncle and Sire,
Dost think that none but *their* Descendings
Can tickle folks with double endings?
I had a Dad, that would for half a bet
Have put down thine thro' half the Alphabet.
Thou, who would be Dan Prior the second,
For Dan Posterior must be reckon'd.

The *Poetical Pieces* add to our knowledge of John Lamb the fact that he lived for a while at Bath, was once a footman, and was later an active member of a Friendly Society for the benefit of its members' widows—a company of fifty good fellows, probably connected more or less with the law, who met at the Devil Tavern to arrange their munificences. Among John Lamb's verses are rhymed addresses written for various annual meetings of this society. It is interesting to note, on the evidence of one of his pieces, that he called his dog after Matt. Prior.

Charles Lamb's mother, Elizabeth Lamb, had been a Field, daughter of a Hertfordshire yeoman. Her mother, Mary Field (born Bruton), was living, at the time of Lamb's birth, at Blakesware, near Ware, in Hertfordshire, as housekeeper and sole custodian of an old mansion belonging to the Plumers. There, as we shall see, her grandchildren often visited her. Lamb's mother was tall and stately; it was said that she might have been a sister of Mrs. Siddons. John Lamb the younger, whom his brother describes as portly, must have inherited from the maternal side his full stature, just as Charles "favoured" his father. Of Mrs. Lamb's character we know little, but I imagine her to have been calm and dignified, with much natural refinement, yet lacking in imaginative sympathy. In one of his letters Lamb told Coleridge that his mother never rightly understood Mary, and that John was her favourite. We should no doubt have had from her son's pen as full a portrait as of his father and his brother and sister but for tragic reasons which too soon must be narrated. As it happened, she could not take her right place in his more personal essays. After the year 1798 he referred to her in print only I think twice, and then more as an abstraction than a reality. But we have the beautiful references to her in *Blank Verse*, 1798:—

Oh my dear mother, oh thou dear dead saint!
Where's now that placid face, where oft hath sat
A mother's smile, to think her son should thrive
In this bad world, when she was dead and gone;
And where a tear hath sat (take shame, O son!)
When that same child has prov'd himself unkind.

and again :—

Thou should'st have longer liv'd, and to the grave
Have peacefully gone down in full old age!
Thy children would have tended thy gray hairs.
We might have sat, as we have often done,
By our fireside, and talk'd whole nights away,
Old times, old friends, and old events recalling;
With many a circumstance, of trivial note,
To memory dear, and of importance grown.
How shall we tell them in a stranger's ear?
A wayward son ofttimes was I to thee;
And yet, in all our little bickerings,
Domestic jars, there was, I know not what,
Of tender feeling, that were ill exchang'd
For this world's chilling friendships, and their smiles
Familiar, whom the heart calls strangers still.

And here let us see what manner of man was Samuel Salt, friend and employer of John and Elizabeth Lamb; to whom Charles Lamb eventually owed so much, and to whom indirectly we all therefore owe so much. In the essay on the Old Benchers he stands forth in his unruffled temper and pensive gentility. "S. had the reputation of being a very clever man, and of excellent discernment in the chamber practice of the law. I suspect his knowledge did not amount to much. When a case of difficult disposition of money, testamentary or otherwise, came before him, he ordinarily handed it over with a few instructions to his man Lovel, who was a quick little fellow, and would despatch it out of hand by the light of natural understanding, of which he had an uncommon share. It was incredible what repute for talents S. enjoyed by the mere trick of gravity. He was a shy man; a child might pose him in a minute—indolent and procrastinating to the last degree. Yet men would give him credit for vast application in spite of himself. He was not to be trusted with himself with impunity. He never dressed for a dinner party but he forgot his sword—they wore swords then—or some other necessary part of his equipage. Lovel had his eye upon him on all these occasions, and ordinarily gave him his cue. If there

was any thing which he could speak unseasonably, he was sure to do it.—He was to dine at a relative's of the unfortunate Miss Blandy on the day of her execution ;—and L. who had a wary foresight of his probable hallucinations, before he set out, schooled him with great anxiety not in any possible manner to allude to her story that day. S. promised faithfully to observe the injunction. He had not been seated in the parlour, where the company was expecting the dinner summons, four minutes, when, a pause in the conversation ensuing, he got up, looked out of window, and pulling down his ruffles—an ordinary motion with him—observed, 'it was a gloomy day,' and added, 'Miss Blandy must be hanged by this time, I suppose.'[1]

"Instances of this sort were perpetual. Yet S. was thought by some of the greatest men of his time a fit person to be consulted, not alone in matters pertaining to the law, but in the ordinary niceties and embarrassments of conduct—from force of manner entirely. He never laughed. He had the same good fortune among the female world,—was a known toast with the ladies, and one or two are said to have died for love of him—I suppose, because he never trifled or talked gallantry with them, or paid them, indeed, hardly common attentions. He had a fine face and person. . . ."

Samuel Salt had married young, lost his wife in childbed, and had never recovered from the shock of grief. He sat in Parliament for some years, and was a Governor of thirty hospitals, and Director of the South Sea Company and of the East India Company. It was through his influence that John Lamb entered the South-Sea House, and Charles Lamb Christ's Hospital and the India House. Samuel Salt performed a further service more far-reaching in character when he gave Charles Lamb and his sister the run of his library. "She was tumbled early," Charles says of Mary (in the *Elia* essay "Mackery End"), "by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading, without much selection or prohibition." The spacious closet was Samuel Salt's, and later, we may rest assured, her little brother was tumbled there too. Samuel Salt's library may confidently be called the place of Lamb the book-lover's "kindly engendure." What were the boy's favourite

[1] Lamb adapted this incident for use in "Mr. H."

books we do not know. But in 1796, when recommending *The Compleat Angler* to Coleridge's attention, he says, "it was the delight of my childhood," and in 1828 he describes to Bernard Barton with rapture an edition of the *Pilgrim's Progress* which he knew when a child.

Charles Lamb, as we have seen, was christened by Mr. Jeffs on March 10, 1775. In the essay "My First Play" he has described one of his godfathers. The other was a gunsmith named Henshaw, of whom we know nothing except that he had a dissolute son; but Francis Fielde we seem to know intimately. Fielde was an oilman, of Holborn, at the corner of Featherstone Buildings, and it is to the circumstance that he gave the Lambs their tickets for Drury Lane on the night of the famous performance of "Artaxerxes," in 1780, that he owes his place in an essay on the drama.

He was, says his godson, "a tall grave person, lofty in speech, and had pretensions above his rank. He associated in those days with John Palmer, the comedian, whose gait and bearing he seemed to copy; if John (which is quite as likely) did not rather borrow somewhat of his manner from my godfather. He was also known to, and visited by, Sheridan. It was to his house in Holborn that young Brinsley brought his first wife on her elopement with him from a boarding-school at Bath—the beautiful Maria Linley. My parents were present (over a quadrille table) when he arrived in the evening with his harmonious charge.—From either of these connexions it may be inferred that my godfather could command an order for the then Drury-lane theatre at pleasure—and, indeed, a pretty liberal issue of those cheap billets, in Brinsley's easy autograph, I have heard him say, was the sole remuneration which he had received for many years' nightly illumination of the orchestra and various avenues of that theatre—and he was content it should be so. The honour of Sheridan's familiarity—or supposed familiarity—was better to my godfather than money.

"F. was the most gentlemanly of oilmen; grandiloquent, yet courteous. His delivery of the commonest matters of fact was Ciceronian. He had two Latin words almost constantly in his mouth (how odd sounds Latin from an oilman's lips!), which my better knowledge since has enabled me to correct. In strict pronunciation they should have been sounded *vice*

*versâ*—but in those young years they impressed me with more awe than they would now do, read aright from Seneca or Varro —in his own peculiar pronunciation, monosyllabically elaborated, or Anglicized, into something like *verse verse*. By an imposing manner, and the help of these distorted syllables, he climbed (but that was little) to the highest parochial honours which St. Andrew's has to bestow."

To disentangle fact from fiction, the meat from the sauce, in these paragraphs, is not easy. I have searched in vain in the records of Sheridan for any mention of Fielde's name (it is generally believed that young Brinsley's bride was befriended in London by Mr. Ewart); while Fielde eludes pursuit also in the records of the parish of St. Andrew's. Yet both his acquaintance with Sheridan and his parochial importance have an air of truth.

Francis Fielde, who may have been of the same family as Lamb's mother, despite his redundant "e," was certainly a Holborn oilman, as the directories prove. Latterly he became rich and moved to New Cavendish Street, where he died in 1809. We shall come to him again in connection with a little piece of property which passed to his godson in 1812. To this Lamb alludes later in the same essay; and we know it to have been a genuine inheritance—although it reached the essayist indirectly.

## CHAPTER II

### AUNT HETTY

Sarah Lamb and her Youngest Nephew—Mr. Billet—"The Witch Aunt"—Sarah Lamb and Elizabeth Lamb—The Beggar and the Cake.

WE may suppose that the principal companion of the little boy as he grew out of infancy into childhood, and out of childhood into boyhood, was his sister Mary. Since she was in her eleventh year when he was born, she would be, when he was five, quite of an age to take charge of him. John Lamb was sufficiently occupied in attending to Mr. Salt; Mrs. Lamb also probably had enough to do, for I imagine that in addition to her own household she had Mr. Salt's table to consider; while John Lamb the younger, who when his small brother was five was probably just beginning life in an office, had, we may safely assume, no particular taste for playing with any one so immature. Mary would thus be Charles's most intimate companion; and in the *Poetry for Children*, which the two were to write thirty years later, we may, I think, find many reflections of their companionship.

But there was still another member of the family whose influence on the little boy's mind was very considerable, especially, I think, as the child grew older and was ready for something riper than at that time Mary Lamb was in a position to offer. Sarah Lamb, John Lamb's unmarried sister, known as Aunt Hetty, seems to have been in a peculiarly intimate way the friend of her younger nephew. The several glimpses of her in the essays and letters agree in making her loving, and sensitive, and misunderstood; also a little forbidding and difficult, as we say. But her kindness to Charles was unfailing. "I had an aunt," he wrote in "My Relations," "a dear and good one. She was one whom single blessedness had soured to the world. She often used to say, that I was the

only thing in it which she loved; and, when she thought I was quitting it, she grieved over me with mother's tears A partiality quite so exclusive my reason cannot altogether approve. She was from morning till night poring over good books, and devotional exercises. Her favourite volumes were Thomas à Kempis, in Stanhope's translation; and a Roman Catholic Prayer Book, with the *matins* and *complines* regularly set down,—terms which I was at that time too young to understand. She persisted in reading them, although admonished daily concerning their Papistical tendency; and went to church every Sabbath, as a good Protestant should do. These were the only books she studied; though, I think, at one period of her life, she told me, she had read with great satisfaction the Adventures of an Unfortunate Young Nobleman.

"Finding the door of the chapel in Essex-street open one day—it was in the infancy of that heresy—she went in, liked the sermon, and the manner of worship, and frequented it at intervals for some time after. She came not for doctrinal points, and never missed them. With some little asperities in her constitution, which I have above hinted at, she was a steadfast, friendly being, and a fine *old Christian*. She was a woman of strong sense, and a shrewd mind—extraordinary at a *repartee;* one of the few occasions of her breaking silence —else she did not much value wit. The only secular employment I remember to have seen her engaged in, was the splitting of French beans, and dropping them into a China basin of fair water. The odour of those tender vegetables to this day comes back upon my sense, redolent of soothing recollections. Certainly it is the most delicate of culinary operations."

No example of Aunt Hetty's power of repartee is given by her nephew, who shared her gift, but he records one of her unfortunate slips of the tongue. The narrative is indispensable, both for its humour and for the light which it sheds not only upon Aunt Hetty's manner, but also upon the household in the Temple and the company to which the little grave boy was accustomed. The passage is in "Poor Relations": "At my father's table (no very splendid one) was to be found, every Saturday, the mysterious figure of an aged gentleman, clothed in neat black, of a sad yet comely appearance. His deportment was of the essence of gravity; his words few or none; and I was not to

make a noise in his presence. I had little inclination to have done so—for my cue was to admire in silence. A particular elbow chair was appropriated to him, which was in no case to be violated. A peculiar sort of sweet pudding, which appeared on no other occasion, distinguished the days of his coming. I used to think him a prodigiously rich man. All I could make out of him was, that he and my father had been school-fellows a world ago at Lincoln, and that he came from the Mint. The Mint I knew to be a place where all the money was coined—and I thought he was the owner of all that money. Awful ideas of the Tower twined themselves about his presence. He seemed above human infirmities and passions. A sort of melancholy grandeur invested him. From some inexplicable doom I fancied him obliged to go about in an eternal suit of mourning; a captive—a stately being, let out of the Tower on Saturdays.

"Often have I wondered at the temerity of my father, who, in spite of an habitual general respect which we all in common manifested towards him, would venture now and then to stand up against him in some argument, touching their youthful days. The houses of the ancient city of Lincoln are divided (as most of my readers know) between the dwellers on the hill, and in the valley. This marked distinction formed an obvious division between the boys who lived above (however brought together in a common school) and the boys whose paternal residence was on the plain; a sufficient cause of hostility in the code of these young Grotiuses. My father had been a leading Mountaineer; and would still maintain the general superiority, in skill and hardihood, of the *Above Boys* (his own faction) over the *Below Boys* (so were they called), of which party his contemporary had been a chieftain. Many and hot were the skirmishes on this topic—the only one upon which the old gentleman was ever brought out—and bad blood bred; even sometimes almost to the recommencement (so I expected) of actual hostilities. But my father, who scorned to insist upon advantages, generally contrived to turn the conversation upon some adroit by-commendation of the old Minster; in the general preference of which, before all other cathedrals in the island, the dweller on the hill, and the plain-born, could meet on a conciliating level, and lay down their less important differences.

"Once only I saw the old gentleman really ruffled, and I remembered with anguish the thought that came over me: 'Perhaps he will never come here again.' He had been pressed to take another plate of the viand, which I have already mentioned as the indispensable concomitant of his visits. He had refused, with a resistance amounting to rigour—when my aunt, an old Lincolnian, but who had something of this, in common with my cousin Bridget, that she would sometimes press civility out of season—uttered the following memorable application—'Do take another slice, Mr. Billet, for you do not get pudding every day.' The old gentleman said nothing at the time—but he took occasion in the course of the evening, when some argument had intervened between them, to utter with an emphasis which chilled the company, and which chills me now as I write it—'Woman, you are superannuated.' John Billet did not survive long, after the digesting of this affront; but he survived long enough to assure me that peace was actually restored! and, if I remember aright, another pudding was discreetly substituted in the place of that which had occasioned the offence."

In the story of Maria Howe, which Charles Lamb contributed to *Mrs. Leicester's School*, I think we have beyond question a genuine experience of his own as a child, as well as, under the style "The Witch Aunt," a further description of Sarah Lamb. "My aunt," wrote Lamb (as Maria Howe) in 1808, when he was thirty-three, "my aunt was my father's sister. She had never been married. My father was a good deal older than my mother, and my aunt was ten years older than my father. As I was often left at home with her, and as my serious disposition so well agreed with hers, an intimacy grew up between the old lady and me, and she would often say, that she only loved one person in the world, and that was me. Not that she and my parents were on very bad terms; but the old lady did not feel herself respected enough. The attention and fondness which she shewed to me, conscious as I was that I was almost the only being she felt any thing like fondness to, made me love her, as it was natural; indeed I am ashamed to say that I fear I almost loved her better than both my parents put together. But there was an oddness, a silence about my aunt, which was never interrupted but by her occasional expressions of love to me, that made me stand in fear of her. An odd look from under her spectacles would sometimes

scare me away, when I had been peering up in her face to make her kiss me. Then she had a way of muttering to herself, which, though it was good words and religious words that she was mumbling, somehow I did not like. My weak spirits, and the fears I was subject to, always made me afraid of any personal singularity or oddness in any one. . . .

"But I must return to my studies, and tell you what books I found in the closet, and what reading I chiefly admired. There was a great Book of Martyrs in which I used to read, or rather I used to spell out meanings; for I was too ignorant to make out many words; but there it was written all about those good men who chose to be burnt alive, rather than forsake their religion, and become naughty papists. Some words I could make out, some I could not; but I made out enough to fill my little head with vanity, and I used to think I was so courageous I could be burnt too, and I would put my hands upon the flames which were pictured in the pretty pictures which the book had, and feel them. . . .

"Then there was a book not so big, but it had pictures in, it was called Culpepper's Herbal; it was full of pictures of plants and herbs, but I did not much care for that. Then there was Salmon's Modern History, out of which I picked a good deal. It had pictures of Chinese gods, and the great hooded serpent which ran strangely in my fancy. There were some law books too, but the old English frighted me from reading them. But above all, what I relished was Stackhouse's History of the Bible, where there was the picture of the Ark and all the beasts getting into it. This delighted me, because it puzzled me, and many an aching head have I got with poring into it, and contriving how it might be built, with such and such rooms, to hold all the world if there should be another flood, and sometimes settling what pretty beasts should be saved, and what should not, for I would have no ugly or deformed beast in my pretty ark. . . .

"Besides the picture of the Ark, and many others which I have forgot, Stackhouse contained one picture which made more impression upon my childish understanding than all the rest. It was the picture of the raising up of Samuel, which I used to call the Witch of Endor picture. I was always very fond of picking up stories about witches. There was a book called Glanvil on Witches, which used to lie about in this closet; it was thumbed

about, and shewed it had been much read in former times. This was my treasure. Here I used to pick out the strangest stories. My not being able to read them very well probably made them appear more strange and out of the way to me. But I could collect enough to understand that witches were old women who gave themselves up to do mischief;—how, by the help of spirits as bad as themselves, they lamed cattle, and made the corn not grow; and how they made images of wax to stand for people that had done them any injury, or they thought had done them injury; and how they burnt the images before a slow fire, and stuck pins in them; and the persons which these waxen images represented, however far distant, felt all the pains and torments in good earnest, which were inflicted in show upon these images. . . .

"One night that I had been terrified in my sleep with my imaginations, I got out of bed, and crept softly to the adjoining room. My room was next to where my aunt usually sat when she was alone. Into her room I crept for relief from my fears. The old lady was not yet retired to rest, but was sitting with her eyes half open, half closed; her spectacles tottering upon her nose; her head nodding over her prayer-book; her lips mumbling the words as she read them, or half read them, in her dozing posture; her grotesque appearance; her old-fashioned dress, resembling what I had seen in that fatal picture in Stackhouse; all this, with the dead time of night, as it seemed to me, (for I had gone through my first sleep,) all joined to produce a wicked fancy in me, that the form which I had beheld was not my aunt, but some witch. Her mumbling of her prayers confirmed me in this shocking idea. I had read in Glanvil of those wicked creatures reading their prayers *backwards*, and I thought that this was the operation which her lips were at this time employed about. Instead of flying to her friendly lap for that protection which I had so often experienced when I have been weak and timid, I shrunk back terrified and bewildered to my bed, where I lay in broken sleeps and miserable fancies, till the morning, which I had so much reason to wish for, came.

"My fancies a little wore away with the light, but an impression was fixed, which could not for a long time be done away. In the day-time, when my father and mother were about the house, when I saw them familiarly speak to my aunt, my fears

SAUL CONSULTING A WITCH AT ENDOR

FROM STACKHOUSE'S *NEW HISTORY OF THE HOLY BIBLE*

all vanished; and when the good creature has taken me upon her knees, and shewn me any kindness more than ordinary, at such times I have melted into tears, and longed to tell her what naughty foolish fancies I had had of her. But when night returned, that figure which I had seen recurred;—the posture, the half-closed eyes, the mumbling and muttering which I had heard, a confusion was in my head, *who* it was I had seen that night:—it was my aunt, and it was not my aunt:—it was that good creature who loved me above all the world, engaged at her good task of devotions—perhaps praying for some good to me. Again, it was a witch,—a creature hateful to God and man, reading backwards the good prayers; who would perhaps destroy me. In these conflicts of mind I passed several weeks."

Certain statements made in the foregoing narrative are corroborated elsewhere. In a letter to Coleridge (quoted on page 114) will be found a further testimony to Aunt Hetty's affection for her nephew; while her complaint that she was not enough respected is thus repeated in a letter from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart: "My father had a sister lived with us—of course, lived with my Mother, her sister-in-law; they were, in their different ways, the best creatures in the world—but they set out wrong at first. They made each other miserable for full twenty years of their lives. My Mother was a perfect gentlewoman, my Aunty as unlike a gentlewoman as you can possibly imagine a good old woman to be; so that my dear Mother (who, though you do not know it, is always in my poor head and heart) used to distress and weary her with incessant and unceasing attention and politeness, to gain her affection. The old woman could not return this in kind, and did not know what to make of it—thought it all deceit, and used to hate my Mother with a bitter hatred; which, of course, was soon returned with interest. A little frankness, and looking into each other's characters at first, would have spared all this, and they would have lived, as they died, fond of each other for the last few years of their life." One other point that is elsewhere corroborated is Sarah Lamb's devotion to Thomas à Kempis, which Lamb mentions in the *Elia* essay "My Relations," as a "favourite volume".

Joseph Glanvill's *Philosophical Considerations Touching Witches and Witchcraft*, and Stackhouse's *History of the*

*Bible*, would perhaps be among Samuel Salt's books to which the children had access. The circumstance that Lamb had put the same experience of fright into the mouth of John Woodvil some seven or eight years earlier than this story of "The Witch Aunt," and that some fourteen years later he transferred it to his own, in the *Elia* essay "Witches and Other Night Fears," may perhaps convince us of its truth.

Probably Aunt Hetty found in her little nephew the understanding that she needed; for imaginative sympathy, of which Charles Lamb had so great a share, is not a graft, but in those who are blessed with it a possession from their earliest days. One of Aunt Hetty's methods of requiting his comforting comprehension of her temperament was very practical. Two passages in the essays bear upon it. In the "Dissertation on Roast Pig" Lamb writes: "My good old aunt, who never parted from me at the end of a holiday without stuffing a sweet-meat, or some nice thing, into my pocket, had dismissed me one evening with a smoking plum-cake, fresh from the oven. In my way to school (it was over London Bridge) a grey-headed old beggar saluted me (I have no doubt at this time of day that he was a counterfeit). I had no pence to console him with, and in the vanity of self-denial, and the very coxcombry of charity, school-boy-like, I made him a present of—the whole cake!

"I walked on a little, buoyed up, as one is on such occasions, with a sweet soothing of self-satisfaction; but before I had got to the end of the bridge, my better feelings returned, and I burst into tears, thinking how ungrateful I had been to my good aunt, to go and give her good gift away to a stranger, that I had never seen before, and who might be a bad man for aught I knew; and then I thought of the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I—I myself, and not another—would eat her nice cake—and what should I say to her the next time I saw her—how naughty I was to part with her pretty present—and the odour of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she sent it to the oven, and how disappointed she would feel that I had never had a bit of it in my mouth at last—and I blamed my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness,

and above all I wished never to see the face again of that insidious, good-for-nothing, old grey impostor."[1]

And in the *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital Aunt Hetty's alleviation of the school kitchen's austerity is thus described (in a passage where Lamb refers to himself as another and to Coleridge as himself): "In lieu of our *half-pickled* Sundays, or *quite fresh* boiled beef on Thursdays (strong as *caro equina*), with detestable marigolds floating in the pail to poison the broth—our scanty mutton crags on Fridays—and rather more savoury, but grudging, portions of the same flesh, rotten-roasted or rare, on the Tuesdays (the only dish which excited our appetites, and disappointed our stomachs, in almost equal proportion)—he had his hot plate of roast veal, or the more tempting griskin (exotics unknown to our palates), cooked in the paternal kitchen (a great thing), and brought him daily by his maid or aunt! I remember the good old relative (in whom love forbade pride) squatting down upon some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters, disclosing the viands (of higher regale than those cates which the ravens ministered to the Tishbite); and the contending passions of L. at the unfolding. There was love for the bringer; shame for the thing brought, and the manner of its bringing; sympathy for those who were too many to share in it; and, at top of all, hunger (eldest, strongest of the passions!) predominant, breaking down the stony fences of shame, and awkwardness, and a troubling over-consciousness."

[1] The reference to London Bridge (which occurs also in the letter to Coleridge where the incident is first recorded) makes it just possible that here Lamb is thinking of yet another aunt: for living in the Temple, where Aunt Hetty lived too, he could never have approached either his first school or Christ's Hospital by way of London Bridge. That John Lamb had two sisters we know, and the Southwark aunt may have been the other. In John Lamb's will, made in 1761, he left five guineas to "each of his dear sisters to buy mourning."

## CHAPTER III

### MRS. FIELD AND BLAKESWARE

Lamb's Hertfordshire Kinsmen—Mackery End—Mary and Charles Lamb at the Farm — Miss Sarah Bruton — The Plumers — "The Young Mahometan" — Blakesware — Grandmother Field — Widford — "The Grandame"—The Twelve Cæsars—"Gone or Going."

IN the story of "The Witch Aunt" from which I have quoted, the little frightened child was cured by a visit to a relative. "I soon," he says, "learned to laugh at witch stories; and when I returned after three or four months absence to our own house, my good aunt appeared to me in the same light in which I had viewed her from my infancy, before that foolish fancy possessed me, or rather, I should say, more kind, more fond, more loving than before."

If, as I think, the story of the imaginary Maria Howe and the story of the real little Charles Lamb are one, and true, there were but two relations whom he would have visited; and these were his grandmother Field, at Blakesware, and her married sister Mrs. Gladman, at Mackery End, both in Hertfordshire, the county of which, affectionately remembering these early associations, Lamb, in later life, by a pretty fiction, declared himself a "native." Probably the visit which cured him of the morbid fancy concerning his aunt was to Blakesware, for at that time he must have been six or seven; but since there is no doubt that his first journey into Hertfordshire, as a conscious observer, took him to his great-aunt Gladman's, we will pause at Mackery End before passing on to Blakesware.

"The oldest thing I remember," Lamb says in the *Elia* essay, "is Mackery End. . . . I can just remember having been there, on a visit to a great-aunt, when I was a child, under the care of Bridget." This would be, let us suppose, in 1779 or thereabout; and it was, I think, the same visit that is described with so much simple charm by Mary Lamb in Louisa Manners'

story, in *Mrs. Leicester's School*, a narrative containing several little touches that suggest personal experience. In reading it as a biographical document we should, I think, for "grandmamma" substitute great-aunt; for the girl-narrator of the story, Charles Lamb, then a little boy of four; and for "my sister Sarah" Mary Lamb herself. These substitutions will perhaps be found rather confusing, but the student of Lamb's writings —and here of his sister's too—must be prepared for many examples of exchanged or fused identity and freakish mystification. "Grandmamma," says the little girl in the story, or, as we are translating it, the little Charles Lamb; "Grandmamma" (that is, my great-aunt Gladman) "was very glad to see me, and she was very sorry that I did not remember her, though I had been so fond of her when she was in town but a few months before. I was quite ashamed of my bad memory. My sister Sarah shewed me all the beautiful places about grandmamma's house. She first took me into the farm-yard, and I peeped into the barn; there I saw a man threshing, and as he beat the corn with his flail, he made such a dreadful noise that I was frightened and ran away: my sister persuaded me to return; she said Will Tasker was very goodnatured: then I went back, and peeped at him again; but as I could not reconcile myself to the sound of his flail, or the sight of his black beard, we proceeded to see the rest of the farm-yard. . . . The hens were feeding all over the yard, and the prettiest little chickens, they were feeding too, and little yellow ducklings that had a hen for their mamma. She was so frightened if they went near the water. Grandmamma says a hen is not esteemed a very wise bird.

"The time I passed at my grandmamma's is always in my mind. Sometimes I think of the good-natured pied cow, that would let me stroke her, while the dairy-maid was milking her. Then I fancy myself running after the dairy-maid into the nice clean dairy, and see the pans full of milk and cream. Then I remember the wood-house; it had once been a large barn, but being grown old, the wood was kept there. My sister and I used to peep about among the faggots to find the eggs the hens sometimes left there. Birds' nests we might not look for. Grandmamma was very angry once, when Will Tasker brought home a bird's nest, full of pretty speckled eggs, for me. She

sent him back to the hedge with it again. She said, the little birds would not sing any more, if their eggs were taken away from them.

"A hen, she said, was a hospitable bird, and always laid more eggs than she wanted, on purpose to give her mistress to make puddings and custards with.

"I do not know which pleased grandmamma best, when we carried her home a lap-full of eggs, or a few violets; for she was particularly fond of violets. . . ."

Finally we have this passage, which must surely be an authentic recollection: old Spot at any rate sounds very real—"When the currants and gooseberries were quite ripe, grandmamma had a sheep-shearing. All the sheep stood under the trees to be sheared. They were brought out of the field by old Spot, the shepherd. I stood at the orchard-gate, and saw him drive them all in. When they had cropped off all their wool, they looked very clean, and white, and pretty; but, poor things, they ran shivering about with cold, so that it was a pity to see them. Great preparations were making all day for the sheep-shearing supper. Sarah said, a sheep-shearing was not to be compared to a harvest-home, *that* was so much better, for that then the oven was quite full of plum-pudding, and the kitchen was very hot indeed with roasting beef; yet I can assure you there was no want at all of either roast beef or plum-pudding at the sheep-shearing.

"My sister and I were permitted to sit up till it was almost dark, to see the company at supper. They sate at a long oak table, which was finely carved, and as bright as a looking-glass.

"I obtained a great deal of praise that day, because I replied so prettily when I was spoken to. My sister was more shy than me; never having lived in London was the reason of that. After the happiest day bedtime will come! We sate up late; but at last grandmamma sent us to bed: yet though we went to bed we heard many charming songs sung: to be sure we could not distinguish the words, which was a pity, but the sound of their voices was very loud and very fine indeed.

"The common supper that we had every night was very cheerful. Just before the men came out of the field, a large faggot was flung on the fire; the wood used to crackle and blaze, and smell delightfully: and then the crickets, for they loved the fire,

MACKERY END. BACK VIEW (AS IN LAMB'S DAY)

MACKERY END. FRONT VIEW (RESTORED)

they used to sing, and old Spot, the shepherd, who loved the fire as well as the crickets did, he used to take his place in the chimney corner; after the hottest day in summer, there old Spot used to sit. It was a seat within the fire-place, quite under the chimney, and over his head the bacon hung. When old Spot was seated, the milk was hung in a skillet over the fire, and then the men used to come and sit down at the long white table."

On this first visit, the farm, Lamb tells us in the *Elia* essay "Mackery End," "was in the occupation of a substantial yeoman, who had married my grandmother's sister. His name was Gladman. My grandmother was a Bruton, married to a Field." Lamb added—he was writing in 1821—that the Gladmans and the Brutons were still flourishing in that part of the county, but the Fields were almost extinct.

A Miss Sarah Bruton is still flourishing at Wheathampstead, and on her wall are a pair of oval portraits of very charming young women—possibly two of the comely Brutons of whom Lamb speaks later. The Fields are now, I fear, quite extinct. Mackery End is a hamlet some three miles from Wheathampstead, and rather nearer to Harpenden—consisting of a large house, some cottages, and the farm where the children stayed. It is now, in 1904, in the tenancy of Mr. Dolphin Smith. The house has been refronted but otherwise is as it was in Lamb's day, and one can sit, as I have done, in the very room where he must have sat, both as a very little boy, and again, somewhere about 1815, when he and his sister and Barron Field walked thither, as he describes with so much charm in the *Elia* essay.[1] We shall return to Mackery End in a later chapter, on the occasion of this second visit; meanwhile it is time to say something of Mary Field, Mrs. Gladman's sister, and Lamb's other Hertfordshire friend.

That Mary Field was born a Bruton is all we know; while of Mr. Field—Elizabeth Lamb's father and Charles Lamb's maternal grandfather—we have no knowledge. Lamb probably never saw him. Since it is on record that Mrs. Field was for upwards of fifty years a servant of the Plumer family, it is likely either

[1] Lamb says, in the essay, that more than forty years had elapsed since his first visit, but this cannot have been the case, for Barron Field was out of England from the summer of 1816 to 1824, and the essay was published in 1821. If 1815 were the date, then the intervening years would number some thirty-six or seven.

that Mr. Field died when his wife was very young or that he also served the same employers.

The Plumers occupy so interesting a place in the background of Lamb's life that a few words on the family may well come at this point; and I cannot do better than reproduce an account of them from an article by Mr. C. E. Johnson in the *Home Counties Magazine*. The earliest Plumer whom we need call forth was Colonel John Plumer, the son of John Plumer of Windsor. "In 1678 he married Mary, daughter of William Hale of King's Walden, Herts, by whom he had four sons and four daughters; one of the latter, Anne, married James, seventh Earl of Abercorn. In 1683 he bought Blakesware, and was sheriff in 1689, and in 1701 bought New Place [at Gilston, also in Hertfordshire]. He died in 1719, and was buried beside his wife in Eastwick Church. New Place and Blakesware went to his second son, William Plumer [Mrs. Field's first employer], who married, in 1731, Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Byde, Esq., of Ware Park, and had several children by her. He was M.P. for the county in 1754, and died in 1767, aged eighty, survived by his wife, who lived at Blakesware with the younger children till her death in 1778, whilst the eldest son, William [whom Lamb calls a fine old Whig], lived at New Place. [It was after her death in 1778, when Lamb was three, that Mrs. Field assumed sole control of the house, which she held till her own death in 1792.] William Plumer had married, in 1760, Frances, daughter of the seventh Viscount Falkland, but she died in 1761 without issue. In 1791 he married his cousin, Jane Hamilton, daughter of Hon. George Hamilton, canon of Windsor, and granddaughter of the Earl of Abercorn and Anne Plumer. . . .

"In 1822 William Plumer died; he had been M.P. for the county from 1768 to 1807, and for Higham Ferrers from 1812 till his death. . . . He was aged eighty-six, and was buried at Eastwick. Being without issue he left his properties of Gilston Park (as New Place was now called) and Blakesware to his widow, apparently with an understanding that the old house at Blakesware, which was built by Sir Thomas Leventhorpe about 1640, should be pulled down. . . . Mrs. Plumer lived on at Gilston Park, where she kept great state, driving about the country in a huge four-horse chariot, preceded by outriders in livery; and she so blocked up the neighbouring lanes that she had to have

'bays' or 'turn-outs' cut in the hedges to allow other carriages to pass. In 1825 she married Captain R. J. Lewin, R.N., who died two years later. She then married Robert Ward (author of *Tremaine*) who assumed the name of Plumer Ward. . . . In 1831 Mrs. Plumer died without issue, leaving Gilston Park to her husband, who was high sheriff in 1832. He spent most of the remainder of his life abroad, and died in 1846."

We have seen that from 1778, when Mrs. Plumer died, until 1792, Mrs. Field was in sole charge of Blakesware House. Lamb was too young to know Blakesware until after his grandmother reigned supreme there, and he thus escaped that risk of meeting with the house's rightful owner, and irksomeness of avoiding her, which might have impaired all his pleasure; but that Mary Lamb knew Mrs. Plumer we may feel certain from her story of "The Young Mahometan" told by Margaret Green in *Mrs. Leicester's School*. In 1778 Mary Lamb was fourteen, but exactly at what time in her life she had lived with her grandmother we do not know; almost certainly before Charles was born, in 1775. The actual history of the young Mahometan may have been largely invented, but substituting "Mrs. Plumer" for "Mrs. Beresford," "my grandmother" for "my mother," and "Mary" for "Margaret," we may assume much of the following account to be true.

"Mrs. Beresford lived in a large old family mansion; she kept no company, and never moved except from the breakfast-parlour to the eating-room, and from thence to the drawing-room to tea. Every morning when she first saw me, she used to nod her head very kindly, and say, 'How do you do, little Margaret?' But I do not recollect she ever spoke to me during the remainder of the day; except indeed after I had read the psalms and the chapters, which was my daily task; then she used constantly to observe, that I improved in my reading, and frequently added, 'I never heard a child read so distinctly.'

"She had been remarkably fond of needle-work, and her conversation with my mother was generally the history of some pieces of work she had formerly done; the dates when they were begun, and when finished; what had retarded their progress, and what had hastened their completion. If occasionally any other events were spoken of, she had no other chronology to reckon by, than in the recollection of what carpet, what sofa-cover, what set of chairs, were in the frame at that time.

"I believe my mother is not particularly fond of needle-work; for in my father's lifetime I never saw her amuse herself in this way; yet, to oblige her kind patroness, she undertook to finish a large carpet, which the old lady had just begun when her eyesight failed her. All day long my mother used to sit at the frame, talking of the shades of the worsted, and the beauty of the colours;—Mrs. Beresford seated in a chair near her, and, though her eyes were so dim she could hardly distinguish one colour from another, watching through her spectacles the progress of the work.

"When my daily portion of reading was over, I had a taste of needle-work, which generally lasted half an hour. I was not allowed to pass more time in reading or work, because my eyes were very weak, for which reason I was always set to read in the large-print Family Bible. I was very fond of reading; and when I could unobserved steal a few minutes as they were intent on their work, I used to delight to read in the historical part of the Bible; but this, because of my eyes, was a forbidden pleasure; and the Bible never being removed out of the room, it was only for a short time together that I dared softly to lift up the leaves and peep into it.

"As I was permitted to walk in the garden or wander about the house whenever I pleased, I used to leave the parlour for hours together, and make out my own solitary amusement as well as I could. My first visit was always to a very large hall, which, from being paved with marble, was called the marble hall. In this hall, while Mrs. Beresford's husband was living, the tenants used to be feasted at Christmas.

"The heads of the twelve Cæsars were hung round the hall. Every day I mounted on the chairs to look at them, and to read the inscriptions underneath, till I became perfectly familiar with their names and features.[1]

"Hogarth's prints were below the Cæsars: I was very fond of looking at them, and endeavouring to make out their meaning.

"An old broken battledore, and some shuttlecocks with most of the feathers missing, were on a marble slab in one corner of

[1] In a letter to Southey (Oct. 31st, 1799) Lamb also says that the Cæsars hung. Elsewhere he calls them busts. Mary Lamb suggests that they were medallions; or she may mean that they stood on hanging brackets.

the hall, which constantly reminded me that there had once been younger inhabitants here than the old lady and her grey-headed servants. In another corner stood a marble figure of a satyr: every day I laid my hand on his shoulder to feel how cold he was.

"This hall opened into a room full of family portraits. They were all in the dresses of former times: some were old men and women, and some were children. I used to long to have a fairy's power to call the children down from their frames to play with me. One little girl in particular, who hung by the side of a glass door which opened into the garden, I often invited to walk there with me, but she still kept her station—one arm round a little lamb's neck, and in her hand a large bunch of roses.

"From this room I usually proceeded to the garden.

"When I was weary of the garden I wandered over the rest of the house. The best suite of rooms I never saw by any other light than what glimmered through the tops of the window-shutters, which however served to shew the carved chimney-pieces, and the curious old ornaments about the rooms; but the worked furniture and carpets, of which I heard such constant praises, I could have but an imperfect sight of, peeping under the covers which were kept over them, by the dim light; for I constantly lifted up a corner of the envious cloth, that hid these highly-praised rarities from my view.

"The bed-rooms were also regularly explored by me, as well to admire the antique furniture, as for the sake of contemplating the tapestry hangings, which were full of Bible history. The subject of the one which chiefly attracted my attention, was Hagar and her son Ishmael. Every day I admired the beauty of the youth, and pitied the forlorn state of him and his mother in the wilderness."

These passages have the circumstantiality of truth: among the Lamb children Mrs. Field's favourite seems (like her daughter's) to have been John. Mary remarks in one of her brother's letters, after the tragedy, that her grandmother used often to complain of her "poor moythered brains." And Charles Lamb also gives one example of a certain lack of tenderness in the old lady. In a little essay which he wrote to accompany an engraving in the *Gem* for 1830, he portrayed his grandmother in what, I think,

we may feel assured, even allowing for his tendency to whimsical deception, were the colours of life. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. I am always disposed to add, so are those of Grandmothers. *Mine* . . . had never-failing pretexts of tormenting children for their good. I was a chit then; and I well remember when a fly had got into a corner of my eye, and I was complaining of it to her, the old Lady deliberately pounded two ounces or more of the finest loaf sugar that could be got, and making me hold open the eye as wide as I could—all innocent of her purpose—she blew from delicate white paper, with a full breath, the whole saccharine contents into the part afflicted, saying, 'There, now the fly is out!' 'Twas most true—a legion of blue-bottles, with the prince of flies at their head, must have dislodged with the torrent and deluge of tears which followed. I kept my own counsel, and my fly in my eye when I had got one, in future, without troubling her dulcet applications for the remedy.

"Then her medicine-case was a perfect magazine of tortures for infants. She seemed to have no notion of the comparatively tender drenches which young internals require—her potions were any thing but milk for babes. Then her sewing up of a cut finger—pricking a whitloe before it was ripe, because she could not see well,—with the aggravation of the pitying tone she did it in.

"But of all her nostrums—rest her soul—nothing came up to the Saturday Night's flannel—that rude fragment of a Witney blanket—Wales spins none so coarse—thrust into the corners of a weak child's eye with soap that might have absterged an Ethiop, whitened the hands of Duncan's She-murderer, and scowered away Original Sin itself."

Yet in spite of rough remedies, there seems to have been no want of sympathy between Mrs. Field and her younger grandson, however she may have failed with Mary; and (despite the fly in the eye) the tenderest memories of Charles Lamb's childhood and boyhood are entwined about Blakesware and its presiding spirit. Portions of the essays "Blakesmoor in H——shire," "Dream Children" and "The Last Peach" form the best introduction to Mrs. Field and her little kingdom. "Every plank and pannel of that house"—Lamb wrote in "Blakesmoor in H——shire," after visiting the scene of destruction—"for me

had magic in it. The tapestried bed-rooms—tapestry so much better than painting—not adorning merely, but peopling the wainscots—at which childhood ever and anon would steal a look, shifting its coverlid (replaced as quickly) to exercise its tender courage in a momentary eye-encounter with those stern bright visages, staring reciprocally—all Ovid on the walls, in colours vivider than his descriptions. Actæon in mid sprout, with the unappeasable prudery of Diana; and the still more provoking, and almost culinary coolness of Dan Phœbus, eel-fashion, deliberately divesting of Marsyas."

The late Mrs. Coe, born Elizabeth Hunt of Widford, whom we meet in Chapter XLV, remembered Blakesware as it used to be in the late twenties of the last century. It was then, she told me, only partly destroyed. She recollected particularly the figure of Nebuchadnezzar eating grass, in one of the pieces of tapestry, with his long fingers like bird's claws. It was one of the great treats for her and her playmates to pretend to take rides in Mrs. Plumer's state coach, which Lamb's friend John Lily, the postillion (to whom we come directly), had often driven.

To take up Lamb's story again: "Then, that haunted room—in which old Mrs. Battle died—whereinto I have crept, but always in the day-time, with a passion of fear; and a sneaking curiosity, terror-tainted, to hold communication with the past. —*How shall they build it up again?*

"It was an old deserted place, yet not so long deserted but that traces of the splendour of past inmates were everywhere apparent. Its furniture was still standing—even to the tarnished gilt leather battledores, and crumbling feathers of shuttlecocks in the nursery, which told that children had once played there. But I was a lonely child, and had the range at will of every apartment, knew every nook and corner, wondered and worshipped everywhere.

"The solitude of childhood is not so much the mother of thought, as it is the feeder of love, and silence, and admiration. So strange a passion for the place possessed me in those years, that, though there lay—I shame to say how few roods distant from the mansion—half hid by trees, what I judged some romantic lake, such was the spell which bound me to the house, and such my carefulness not to pass its strict and proper precincts, that the idle waters lay unexplored for me; and not

till late in life, curiosity prevailing over elder devotion, I found, to my astonishment, a pretty brawling brook had been the Lacus Incognitus of my infancy. Variegated views, extensive prospects—and those at no great distance from the house—I was told of such—what were they to me, being out of the boundaries of my Eden?—So far from a wish to roam, I would have drawn, methought, still closer the fences of my chosen prison; and have been hemmed in by a yet securer cincture of those excluding garden walls. . . .

"I was here as in a lonely temple. Snug firesides—the low-built roof—parlours ten feet by ten—frugal boards, and all the homeliness of home—these were the condition of my birth—the wholesome soil which I was planted in. Yet, without impeachment to their tenderest lessons, I am not sorry to have had glances of something beyond; and to have taken, if but a peep, in childhood, at the contrasting accidents of a great fortune.

"To have the feeling of gentility, it is not necessary to have been born gentle. The pride of ancestry may be had on cheaper terms than to be obliged to an importunate race of ancestors; and the coatless antiquary in his unemblazoned cell, revolving the long line of a Mowbray's or De Clifford's pedigree, at those sounding names may warm himself into as gay a vanity as these who do inherit them. The claims of birth are ideal merely, and what herald shall go about to strip me of an idea? Is it trenchant to their swords? can it be hacked off as a spur can? or torn away like a tarnished garter?

"What, else, were the families of the great to us? what pleasure should we take in their tedious genealogies, or their capitulatory brass monuments? What to us the uninterrupted current of their bloods, if our own did not answer within us to a cognate and correspondent elevation.

"Or wherefore, else, O tattered and diminished 'Scutcheon that hung upon the time-worn walls of thy princely stairs, Blakesmoor! have I in childhood so oft stood poring upon thy mystic characters—thy emblematic supporters, with their prophetic 'Resurgam'—till, every dreg of peasantry purging off, I received into myself Very Gentility? Thou wert first in my morning eyes; and of nights, hast detained my steps from bedward, till it was but a step from gazing at thee to

BLAKESWARE ABOUT 1795

FROM A DRAWING IN THE POSSESSION OF MRS. GEORGE NUNN OF HERTFORD

dreaming on thee." The value of these experiences of Blakesware, in his solitary, thoughtful, fanciful childhood, on Lamb's mind can hardly be overestimated. They must have led the little boy into more fantastic avenues of thought than even Samuel Salt's books.

We find Blakesware again in *Rosamund Gray*, written as early as 1798, in one of the passages that are largely autobiographical: "I set out one morning to walk—I reached Widford about eleven in the forenoon—after a slight breakfast at my inn—where I was mortified to perceive, the old landlord did not know me again—(old Thomas Billet—he has often made angle rods for me when a child)—I rambled over all my accustomed haunts.

"Our old house was vacant, and to be sold. I entered, unmolested, into the room that had been my bed-chamber. I kneeled down on the spot where my little bed had stood—I felt like a child—I prayed like one—it seemed as though old times were to return again—I looked round involuntarily, expecting to see some face I knew—but all was naked and mute. The bed was gone. My little pane of painted window, through which I loved to look at the sun, when I awoke in a fine summer's morning, was taken out, and had been replaced by one of common glass. . . .

"I wandered, scarce knowing where, into an old wood, that stands at the back of the house—we called it the *Wilderness*. A well-known *form* was missing, that used to meet me in this place—it was thine, Ben Moxam—the kindest, gentlest, politest, of human beings, yet was he nothing higher than a gardener in the family. Honest creature, thou didst never pass me in my childish rambles, without a soft speech, and a smile. I remember thy good-natured face. But there is one thing, for which I can never forgive thee, Ben Moxam—that thou didst join with an old maiden aunt of mine in a cruel plot, to lop away the hanging branches of the old fir trees.—I remember them sweeping to the ground.

"I have often left my childish sports to ramble in this place—its glooms and its solitude had a mysterious charm for my young mind, nurturing within me that love of quietness and lonely thinking, which have accompanied me to maturer years."

Again in "The Last Peach," printed in 1825, another Blakes-

ware day is restored. "When a child I was once let loose, by favour of a Nobleman's gardener, into his Lordship's magnificent fruit garden, with free leave to pull the currants and the gooseberries; only I was interdicted from touching the wall fruit. Indeed, at that season (it was the end of Autumn) there was little left. Only on the South wall (can I forget the hot feel of the brick-work?) lingered the one last peach. Now peaches are a fruit I always had, and still have, an almost utter aversion to. There is something to my palate singularly harsh and repulsive in the flavour of them. I know not by what demon of contradiction inspired, but I was haunted by an irresistible desire to pluck it. Tear myself as often as I would from the spot, I found myself still recurring to it, till, maddening with desire (desire I cannot call it), with wilfulness rather—without appetite—against appetite, I may call it—in an evil hour I reached out my hand, and plucked it. Some few rain drops just then fell; the sky (from a bright day) became overcast; and I was a type of our first parents, after the eating of that fatal fruit. I felt myself naked and ashamed; stripped of my virtue, spiritless. The downy fruit, whose sight rather than savour had tempted me, dropt from my hand, never to be tasted. All the commentators in the world cannot persuade me but that the Hebrew word in the second chapter of Genesis, translated apple, should be rendered peach. Only this way can I reconcile that mysterious story."

But the most beautiful of all the writings of brother or sister on their second home is the *Elia* essay "Dream Children," where Lamb feigns to be narrating to his children some of the old memories: "Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when *they* were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk [Hertfordshire] (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved

out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding.

"Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by every body, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining county; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house [Gilston], where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, 'that would be foolish indeed.'

"And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psaltery by heart, ay, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious.

"Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up

and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said 'those innocents would do her no harm;' and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous.

"Then I told how good she was to all her grand-children, having us to the great-house in the holydays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Cæsars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken pannels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which, not unobserved by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant.

"Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L——, because he was so handsome and spirited

a youth, and a king to the rest of us, and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries—and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of every body, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially. . . ."

In addition to this picture of Mrs. Field we have Lamb's character sketch of her in the poem "The Grandame," written in 1796, four years after her death on July 31st, 1792, aged seventy-nine. Her grave is in Widford Churchyard.

A plain stone barely tells
The name and date to the chance passenger.
For lowly born was she, and long had eat,
Well-earned, the bread of service :—her's was else
A mounting spirit, one that entertained
Scorn of base action, deed dishonourable,
Or aught unseemly. I remember well
Her reverend image: I remember, too,
With what a zeal she served her master's house;
And how the prattling tongue of garrulous age
Delighted to recount the oft-told tale
Or anecdote domestic. Wise she was,
And wondrous skilled in genealogies,
And could in apt and voluble terms discourse
Of births, of titles, and alliances;
Of marriages, and intermarriages;
Relationship remote, or near of kin;
Of friends offended, family disgraced—
Maiden high-born, but wayward, disobeying
Parental strict injunction, and regardless
Of unmixed blood, and ancestry remote,
Stooping to wed with one of low degree.
But these are not thy praises; and I wrong
Thy honor'd memory, recording chiefly
Things light or trivial. Better 'twere to tell,
How with a nobler zeal, and warmer love,
She served her *heavenly master*.

Blakesware house was pulled down in the late twenties or early thirties of the last century, and everything was moved to Gilston. Gilston was emptied of its treasures, which were sold by auction, in 1851, when the Twelve Cæsars, the Judgment Chair, and the

tapestry were dispersed, no one can tell me whither. I have a suspicion that some of the heads that lurk among the greenery in the Old Rye House pleasure gardens at Broxbourne may have come from Blakesware, for the tenant of that odd pleasure resort in 1851 is known to have been a purchaser at the sale; but certainty is out of the question. Somewhere Lamb's Twelve Cæsars must surely be, and somewhere the Judgment Chair; such relics are not destroyed.

The present Blakesware house, the seat of Sir Martin Gosselin, stands on the crest of the hill over which, as I suppose, the Wilderness of Lamb's day was spread. Of the old house nothing remains save some grass-covered mounds among trees in the hollow, beneath which are piles of bricks that have never been moved. Standing there one can reconstruct the scene, and by walking a few steps towards the river Ash can see for oneself the Lacus Incognitus of Lamb's childhood.

Blakesware is but a step from Widford, where in the churchyard lie not only Mary Field but other of her friends and Lamb's friends, notably Mrs. Randal Norris. The present spire of the church is not that mentioned at the beginning of "The Grandame," but a new one of recent construction. As a boy Lamb probably had many acquaintances in Widford village, several of whom we meet in the wistful verses which, under the title "Gone or Going," he wrote in 1827 for Hone's *Table Book.*

Fine merry franions,
Wanton companions,
My days are ev'n banyans
With thinking upon ye;
How Death, that last stinger,
Finis-writer, end-bringer,
Has laid his chill finger,
Or is laying on ye.

There's rich Kitty Wheatley,
With footing it featly
That took me completely,
She sleeps in the Kirk House;
And poor Polly Perkin,
Whose Dad was still firking
The jolly ale firkin,
She's gone to the Work-house;

*

WIDFORD CHURCH AND CHURCHYARD

THE SPIRE IS NEW AND NOT AS LAMB SAW IT. MRS. FIELD'S GRAVE IS IMMEDIATELY OVER THE ASTERISK

Fine Gard'ner, Ben Carter
(In ten counties no smarter)
Has ta'en his departure
For Proserpine's orchards;
And Lily, postillion,
With cheeks of vermilion,
Is one of a million
That fill up the church-yards;

And, lusty as Dido,
Fat Clemitson's widow
Flits now a small shadow
By Stygian hid ford;
And good master Clapton
Has thirty years nap't on
The ground he last hap't on,
Intomb'd by fair Widford;

And gallant Tom Dockwra,
Of nature's finest crockery,
Now but thin air and mockery,
Lurks by Avernus,
Whose honest grasp of hand
Still, while his life did stand,
At friend's or foe's command
Almost did burn us.

Kitty Wheatley was probably a relative of Joseph Whately, vicar of Widford in the latter half of the eighteenth century, whose son, afterwards Archbishop Whately, married Jane Plumer. Of Polly Perkin and Tom Dockwra I can discover nothing; but Ben Carter was the gardener at Blakesware, whom Lamb in the passage from *Rosamund Gray* which is quoted above calls Ben Moxam; John Lily, as we have seen, was postillion there; while Clemitson was the Widford innkeeper, whom Lamb calls Thomas Billet in *Rosamund Gray*. The churchyard has many Claptons beneath its turf.

## CHAPTER IV

### FIRST SCHOOL AND FIRST THEATRE

### 1780-1781

Mrs. Reynolds—Hood's Recollections—Miss Pearson's Toyshop—William Bird's Academy—Captain Starkey—"Artaxerxes" and "Harlequin's Invasion"—Mary Lamb's First Play.

FROM the time when Charles Lamb went to Christ's Hospital in 1782, when he was seven and a half, we know more or less accurately how his life was spent; but his earlier childhood remains vague. We can guess a little with the help of *Mrs. Leicester's School* and the *Poetry for Children;* the essays, as we have seen, tell rather more; but that is all. One remark, quoted by Talfourd, shows us, however, that he was thoughtful even as a child. Mary Lamb was taking him through a churchyard filled with testimonies to the virtues of the dead, when he asked, "Mary, where are the naughty people buried?" This must have been after he had learned to read, which he did, we know, very young and very quickly, under his sister's care. He knew his letters before he could talk. Two pieces of stray information which *Elia* affords is (according to "New Year's Eve") that he had small-pox at five, and (according to "Dream Children") that he was once so lame that he had to be carried about by his brother.

It would be I think after Lamb had recovered from small-pox that he began to have lessons from Mrs. Reynolds. I wish I could describe more fully the lady whom Lamb refers to as his schoolmistress, but the feat is now impossible. Her maiden name was Chambers and her father had lived in the Temple; probably she was the "prim Betsy Chambers" of Lamb's verses "Gone or Going":—

—prim Betsy Chambers
Decayed in her members
No longer remembers
Things as she once did.

Mrs. Reynolds was separated from her husband, of whom we know nothing. She touches literature at two points, for not only did she teach Charles Lamb his rudiments but she had been acquainted with Goldsmith, and had read "The Deserted Village" in his own copy, which he lent her for the purpose.

Until quite late in Lamb's life Mrs. Reynolds was a visitor at his various rooms, and her name occurs from time to time in the correspondence. In 1806, for example, Mary Lamb records that a pension of £10 has been conferred upon her by the Temple Society; later, Lamb was to pension her himself, with a liberality far exceeding that of the Law. Of Mrs. Reynolds's personal peculiarities in later life, when she must have been at least seventy, we have a glimpse in *Hood's Own*, in the author's account of his intimacy with Lamb in the Islington and Enfield days. Among Lamb's guests, says Hood, "you occasionally saw an elderly lady, formal, fair, and flaxen-wigged, looking remarkably like a flaxen-haired doll,—and she *did* visit some friends or relations, at a toy-shop near St. Dunstan's. When she spoke, it was as if by an artificial apparatus, through some defect in her palate, and she had a slight limp and a twist in her figure, occasioned—what would Hannah More have said!—by running down Greenwich Hill! This antiquated personage had been Lamb's School-mistress—and on this retrospective consideration, though she could hardly have taught him more than to read his native tongue—he allowed her in her decline a yearly sum, equal to—what shall I say?—to the stipend which some persons of fortune deem sufficient for the active services of an all-accomplished gentlewoman in the education of their children, say, thirty pounds per annum."

(The mention of the toyshop near St. Dunstan's lets us into a little secret in connection with Mary Lamb's story of the "Visit to the Cousins," in *Mrs. Leicester's School*. In that pretty tale, Emily Barton, the narrator, mentions St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet Street, and its iron figures which, like those in Cheapside to-day, struck the time: the figures whose removal some years later caused Lamb to shed tears. She continues: "We

waited some time that I might see this sight, but just at the moment they were striking, I happened to be looking at a toy-shop that was on the other side of the way, and unluckily missed it. Papa said, 'Never mind; we will go into the toy-shop, and I dare say we shall find something that will console you for your disappointment.' 'Do,' said mamma, 'for I knew Miss Pearson, that keeps this shop, at Weymouth, when I was a little girl, not much older than Emily. Take notice of her;—she is a very intelligent old lady.' Mamma made herself known to Miss Pearson, and shewed me to her, but I did not much mind what they said; no more did papa,—for we were busy among the toys." Now this Miss Pearson, whom we find in the London Directory at No. 7 Fleet Street, must, I think, have been Mrs. Reynolds's friend: hence the kindly little advertisement of her shop.)

Lamb passed, probably about 1781, when he was six, from Mrs. Reynolds's simple instruction to the Academy of Mr. William Bird, in Bond Stables (since destroyed), off Fetter Lane, whither Mary had preceded him; and many years afterwards he set down some of their united reminiscences of the school, in some notes on an oddity named Starkey who had been one of Bird's assistants. Starkey had declined upon bad days, and, an inmate of a workhouse, had written his memoirs, wherein he stated that as a youth he was apprenticed to Mr. William Bird, "the eminent writer and teacher of languages and mathematics." The phrase happily caught Lamb's eye, and he wrote as follows in 1825, some forty-four years after:—

"I was a scholar of that 'eminent writer' that he speaks of; but Starkey had quitted the school about a year before I came to it. Still the odour of his merits had left a fragrancy upon the recollection of the elder pupils. The school-room stands where it did, looking into a discoloured dingy garden in the passage leading from Fetter Lane into Bartlett's Buildings. It is still a School, though the main prop, alas! has fallen so ingloriously; and bears a Latin inscription over the entrance in the Lane, which was unknown in our humbler times. Heaven knows what 'languages' were taught in it then; I am sure that neither my Sister nor myself brought any out of it, but a little of our native English. By 'mathematics,' reader, must be understood 'ciphering.' It was in fact a humble day-school,

FLEET STREET, SHOWING ST. DUNSTAN'S CHURCH, AS IT WAS WHEN LAMB WAS A BOY

FROM *ACKERMANN'S REPOSITORY OF ARTS*

at which reading and writing were taught to us boys in the morning, and the same slender erudition was communicated to the girls, our sisters, &c. in the evening. Now Starkey presided, under Bird, over both establishments. In my time, Mr. Cook, now or lately a respectable Singer and Performer at Drury-lane Theatre, and Nephew to Mr. Bird, had succeeded to him.

"I well remember Bird. He was a squat, corpulent, middle-sized man, with something of the gentleman about him, and that peculiar mild tone—especially while he was inflicting punishment—which is so much more terrible to children, than the angriest looks and gestures. Whippings were not frequent; but when they took place, the correction was performed in a private room adjoining, whence we could only hear the plaints, but saw nothing. This heightened the decorum and the solemnity. But the ordinary public chastisement was the bastinado, a stroke or two on the palm with that almost obsolete weapon now—the ferule. A ferule was a sort of flat ruler, widened at the inflicting end into a shape resembling a pear,—but nothing like so sweet—with a delectable hole in the middle, to raise blisters, like a cupping-glass. I have an intense recollection of that disused instrument of torture—and the malignancy, in proportion to the apparent mildness, with which its strokes were applied. The idea of a rod is accompanied with something ludicrous; but by no process can I look back upon this blister-raiser with anything but unmingled horror.—To make him look more formidable—if a pedagogue had need of these heightenings—Bird wore one of those flowered Indian gowns, formerly in use with schoolmasters; the strange figures upon which we used to interpret into hieroglyphics of pain and suffering. But boyish fears apart—Bird I believe was in the main a humane and judicious master.

"O, how I remember our legs wedged in to those uncomfortable sloping desks, where we sat elbowing each other—and the injunctions to attain a free hand, unattainable in that position; the first copy I wrote after, with its moral lesson 'Art improves Nature;' the still earlier pothooks and the hangers some traces of which I fear may yet be apparent in this manuscript; the truant looks side-long to the garden, which seemed a mockery of our imprisonment; the prize for best spelling, which had

almost turned my head, and which to this day I cannot reflect upon without a vanity, which I ought to be ashamed of—our little leaden inkstands, not separately subsisting, but sunk into the desks; the bright, punctually-washed morning fingers, darkening gradually with another and another ink-spot: what a world of little associated circumstances, pains and pleasures mingling their quotas of pleasure, arise at the reading of those few simple words—'Mr. William Bird, an eminent Writer, and Teacher of languages and mathematics in Fetter Lane, Holborn!'"

So far ran Lamb's own recollections. He then added a reminiscence or two which Mary Lamb supplied. "If any of the girls, she says, who were my school-fellows should be reading, through their aged spectacles, tidings from the dead of their youthful friend Starkey, they will feel a pang, as I do, at ever having teased his gentle spirit. They were big girls, it seems, too old to attend his instructions with the silence necessary; and however old age, and a long state of beggary, seem to have reduced his writing faculties to a state of imbecility, in those days, his language occasionally rose to the bold and figurative, for when he was in despair to stop their chattering, his ordinary phrase was, 'Ladies, if you will not hold your peace, not all the powers in heaven can make you.' Once he was missing for a day or two; he had run away. A little old unhappy-looking man brought him back—it was his father—and he did no business in the school that day, but sate moping in a corner, with his hands before his face; and the girls, his tormentors, in pity for his case, for the rest of that day forbore to annoy him.

"I had been there but a few months, adds she, when Starkey, who was the chief instructor of us girls, communicated to us as a profound secret, that the tragedy of 'Cato' was shortly to be acted by the elder boys, and that we were to be invited to the representation. That Starkey lent a helping hand in fashioning the actors, she remembers; and but for his unfortunate person, he might have had some distinguished part in the scene to enact; as it was, he had the arduous task of prompter assigned to him, and his feeble voice was heard clear and distinct, repeating the text during the whole performance."

Such was Charles Lamb's first school, and, so far as we know, Mary Lamb's only school.

At about the same time that his formal education began—at the end of 1780—Charles Lamb saw his first play. It was at Drury Lane on December 1st, 1780, and the programme consisted of Arne's opera "Artaxerxes" and the pantomime "Harlequin's Invasion." According to the essay "My First Play" the Lambs went with pit orders presented by godfather Fielde. That essay is so well known that I prefer to quote here from "Playhouse Memoranda" a first sketch for it, written in 1813:—

"Oh when shall I forget first seeing a play, at the age of five or six? It was *Artaxerxes*. Who played, or who sang in it, I know not. Such low ideas as actors' names, or actors' merits, never entered my head. The mystery of delight was not cut open and dissipated for me by those who took me there. It was *Artaxerxes* and *Arbaces* and *Mandane* that I saw, not Mr. Beard, or Mr. Leoni, or Mrs. Kennedy. It was all enchantment and a dream. No such pleasure has since visited me but in dreams. I was in Persia for the time, and the burning idol of their devotion in the Temple almost converted me into a worshipper. I was awe-struck, and believed those significations to be something more than elemental fires. I was, with Uriel, in the body of the sun.—What should I have gained by knowing (as I should have done, had I been born thirty years later) that that solar representation was a mere painted scene, that had neither fire nor light in itself, and that the royal phantoms, which passed in review before me, were but such common mortals as I could see every day out of my father's window? We crush the faculty of delight and wonder in children, by explaining every thing. We take them to the source of the Nile, and shew them the scanty runnings, instead of letting the beginnings of that seven fold stream remain in impenetrable darkness, a mysterious question of wonderment and delight to ages."

The story of Lamb's progress as a playgoer may be taken up from the *Elia* essay: "The next play to which I was taken was the Lady of the Manor, of which, with the exception of some scenery, very faint traces are left in my memory. It was followed by a pantomime, called Lun's Ghost—a satiric touch, I apprehend, upon Rich, not long since dead—but to my apprehension (too sincere for satire), Lun was as remote a piece of antiquity as Lud—the father of a line of Harlequins—transmitting his dagger of lath (the wooden sceptre) through countless ages. I

saw the primeval Motley come from his silent tomb in a ghastly vest of white patch-work, like the apparition of a dead rainbow. So Harlequins (thought I) look when they are dead.

"My third play followed in quick succession. It was the Way of the World. I think I must have sat at it as grave as a judge; for, I remember, the hysteric affectations of good Lady Wishfort affected me like some solemn tragic passion. Robinson Crusoe followed; in which Crusoe, man Friday, and the parrot, were as good and authentic as in the story.—The clownery and pantaloonery of these pantomimes have clean passed out of my head. I believe, I no more laughed at them, than at the same age I should have been disposed to laugh at the grotesque Gothic heads (seeming to me then replete with devout meaning) that gape, and grin, in stone around the inside of the old Round Church (my church) of the Templars." Lamb saw these plays, he adds, in the season 1781-82, when he was from six to seven years old. He tells us that it was not until after the intervention of six or seven more years (for at school all playgoing was inhibited) that he again entered the doors of a theatre. But after that time—from 1789—he was for some years perhaps the finest playgoer in the world.

Mary Lamb, another born playgoer, has also described her first play; at least I think that we may take Emily Barton's story in *Mrs. Leicester's School*—"The Visit to the Cousins"—to be its author's own experience. Charles began with opera; Mary with tragedy, "The Mourning Bride." "I shall never forget," she writes, "how delighted I was at the first sight of the house. My little friend and I were placed together in the front, while our mammas retired to the back part of the box to chat by themselves, for they had been so kind as to come very early that I might look about me before the performance began.

"Frederica had been very often at a play. She was very useful in telling me what every thing was. She made me observe how the common people were coming bustling down the benches in the galleries, as if they were afraid they should lose their places. She told me what a crowd these poor people had to go through, before they got into the house. Then she shewed me how leisurely they all came into the pit, and looked about them, before they took their seats. She gave me a charming description of the king and queen at the play, and shewed me where they sate,

and told me how the princesses were drest. It was a pretty sight to see the remainder of the candles lighted; and so it was to see the musicians come up from under the stage. I admired the music very much, and I asked if that was the play. Frederica laughed at my ignorance, and then she told me, when the play began, the green curtain would draw up to the sound of soft music, and I should hear a lady dressed in black say,

'Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast;'

and those were the very first words the actress, whose name was Almeria, spoke. When the curtain began to draw up, and I saw the bottom of her black petticoat, and heard the soft music, what an agitation I was in! But before that we had long to wait. Frederica told me we should wait till all the dress boxes were full, and then the lights would pop up under the orchestra; the second music would play, and then the play would begin.

"This play was the Mourning Bride. It was a very moving tragedy; and after that when the curtain dropt, and I thought it was all over, I saw the most diverting pantomime that ever was seen. I made a strange blunder the next day, for I told papa that Almeria was married to Harlequin at last; but I assure you I meant to say Columbine, for I knew very well that Almeria was married to Alphonso; for she said she was in the first scene."

## CHAPTER V

### CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

### 1782-1789

John Lamb's Petition—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Holidays—Food—Matthew Field—James Boyer—Deputy Grecians—"The Rev. Charles Lamb"—Leigh Hunt—Lamb as a Schoolboy—Charles Valentine Le Grice—Samuel Le Grice—Joseph Favell—Pantisocracy—Bob Allen—Thomas Fanshawe Middleton—The Coleridge Memorial.

ON October 9th, 1782, Charles Lamb, a little boy between seven and eight, entered Christ's Hospital. His admission form, which is still preserved at the school, was, in its original petition state, filled in as early as March 30th, 1781. It is a little curious that John Lamb did not sign it, but left that office to his wife; yet so it was. It is also curious that the reason given for the appeal is that the "Petitioner has a wife and three children, and he finds it difficult to maintain and educate his Family without some assistance:" curious, because John Lamb the younger, who was born in 1763, must by that time, one would suppose, have begun to earn money. Mary Lamb, who would be seventeen at the end of the year, was shortly to become a professional needlewoman.

Every boy entering Christ's Hospital had to produce a substantial friend who was prepared to safeguard the school to the sum of £100 against any loss that the scholar's serious misdemeanours might involve. Lamb's guarantor, it will be seen, was one Timothy Yeats and not Samuel Salt, but there is little doubt that Salt was the instigator. Yeats I assume to have been a friend of Salt's, put forward for the purpose of eluding some technical difficulty.

104.

30th March 1781

*To the Right Honourable, Right Worſhipful, and Worſhipful the Governors of* CHRIST'S-HOSPITAL, LONDON.

*The humble Petition of* John Lamb
*of the* ~~Parish of~~ Inner Temple, London, Scrivener.

*Humbly Sheweth,*

THAT the Petitioner has a Wife and three Children and he finds it difficult to maintain and educate his Family without some Assistance

*Therefore He humbly beſeeches your Worſhips, in your uſual Pity and Charity to diſtreſſed Men, poor Widows, and Fatherleſs Children, to grant the Admiſſion of one of his Children into* CHRIST'S-HOSPITAL, *named* Charles Lamb
*of the Age of* Seven *Years and upwards there to be Educated and brought up among other poor Children.*

Cat Reg L

Adm Comm 17th July 1782
Qualified 9th Oct.

*And He ſhall ever pray, &c.*

Reg. fo. 247.

JOHN LAMB'S PETITION FOR CHARLES LAMB'S ENTRY INTO CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

Harvard University

The petition was dated March 30th, 1781; Charles was admitted in July, but not until October 9th was he clothed and received formally into the school. Among the other new boys was one Samuel Taylor Coleridge, aged nearly ten, son of a clergyman in Devonshire; but he was new only to the London school, having already spent a year or so at the juvenile branch at Hertford.

Lamb has told us much about his schooldays, both in the *Elia* essay "Christ's Hospital Five-and-thirty Years Ago" and in the earlier essay on the same topic, written in 1813; but since an odd but characteristic whim prompted him to incorporate many of Coleridge's experiences as his own, his remarks have to be read with care. His schooldays were, I think, probably very pleasant. He liked lessons; he had a few close friends; his home was near at hand and his opportunities for visiting it were numerous. Some idea of the frequency with which he must have hurried through the intervening streets to the Temple may be gained from the *History of Christ's Hospital*, written in 1834 by his schoolfellow A. W. Trollope. There we find a list of holidays independent of the ordinary eleven days at Easter, four weeks in the summer, fifteen days at Christmas and every other Wednesday. "Those days," writes Trollope, "on which *leave* is given to be absent from the Hospital during the whole day, are called *whole-day leaves*. . . . A *ticket* is a small oval medal attached to the button-hole, without which, except on leaves, no boy is allowed to pass the gates. Subjoined is a list of the holidays, which have been hitherto kept at Christ's Hospital; but it is in contemplation to abridge them materially. Of the policy of such a measure grave doubts may fairly be entertained, inasmuch as the vacations are so short as to give sufficient respite neither to master nor scholar; and these occasional breaks, in the arduous duties of the former more especially, enable him to repair the exhausted energies of body and mind by necessary relaxation. If those days, which are marked with an asterisk, fall on a Sunday, they are kept on the Monday following; and likewise the state holidays.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jan. | 25. | St. Paul's conversion. |
| | *30. | King Charles's martyrdom. |
| Feb. | 2. | Candlemas Day. |
| | 24. | St. Matthias. |
| | | Shrove Tuesday. |
| | | Ash Wednesday. |
| March | 25. | Lady Day. |
| April | 23. | St. George. |
| | 25. | St. Mark. |
| May | 1. | St. Philip and St. James. |
| | *29. | Restoration of King Charles II. |
| | | Ascension Day. |
| | | Whit Monday. |
| | | Whit Tuesday. |
| June | 11. | St. Barnabas. |
| | 24. | St. John Baptist. |
| June | 29. | St. Peter. |
| July | 25. | St. James. |
| | | Thursday after St. James (Nurses' Holiday). |
| Aug. | 24. | St. Bartholomew. |
| Sept. | *2. | London burnt. |
| | *21. | St. Matthew. |
| | 29. | St. Michael. |
| Oct. | 18. | St. Luke. |
| | *23. | King Edward VI. born. |
| | 28. | St. Simon and St. Jude. |
| Nov. | 1. | All Saints. |
| | *5. | Gunpowder Plot. |
| | *9. | Lord Mayor's Day. |
| | *17. | Queen Elizabeth's birth-day |
| | 30. | St. Andrew. |
| Dec. | 21. | St. Thomas." |

"Also," Trollope adds, "the birthdays of the King and Queen, and the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the King's accession, proclamation, and coronation."

A passage in the *Elia* essay, in which Lamb speaks of himself as L. and which I think may be accepted as truth, tends to support the theory that his schooldays, although perhaps hard, were not disagreeable to him, howsoever they may have been to Coleridge. "I remember," he says, "L. at school; and can well recollect that he had some peculiar advantages, which I and others of his schoolfellows had not. His friends lived in town, and were near at hand; and he had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction, which was denied to us. The present worthy subtreasurer to the Inner Temple [Randal Norris] can explain how that happened. He had his tea and hot rolls in a morning, while we were battening upon our quarter of a penny loaf—our *crug*—moistened with attenuated small beer, in wooden piggins, smacking of the pitched leathern jack it was poured from. Our Monday's milk porritch, blue and tasteless, and the pease soup of Saturday, coarse and choking, were enriched for him with a slice of 'extraordinary bread and butter,' from the hot-loaf of the Temple. The Wednesday's mess of millet, somewhat less repugnant—(we had three banyan to four meat days in the week)—was endeared to his palate with a lump of double-refined, and a smack of ginger (to make it go down the more glibly) or the fragrant cinnamon."

And again: "L.'s governor (so we called the patron who presented us to the foundation) lived in a manner under his paternal roof. Any complaint which he had to make was sure of being attended to. This was understood at Christ's, and was an effectual screen to him against the severity of masters, or worse tyranny of the monitors."

Two of the poems in *Poetry for Children*, 1809, seem to me to belong to the early days at Christ's Hospital—perhaps to his first Christmas holidays. The verses (both sets probably from Charles Lamb's pen) take the form of a "Sister's Expostulation on the Brother's Learning Latin," and the "Brother's Reply." The sister begins:—

Shut these odious books up, brother—
They have made you quite another
Thing from what you us'd to be—
Once you lik'd to play with me—
Now you leave me all alone,
And are so conceited grown
With your Latin, you'll scarce look
Upon any English book.
We had us'd on winter eves
To con over Shakespeare's leaves,
Or on Milton's harder sense
Exercise our diligence—
And you would explain with ease
The obscurer passages,
Find me out the prettiest places,
The poetic turns, and graces,
Which alas! now you are gone,
I must puzzle out alone,
And oft miss the meaning quite,
Wanting you to set me right.

And so on. Then follows the brother's reply, which is less prettily homely, the end running thus:—

But if all this anger grow
From this cause, that you suspect
By proceedings indirect,
I would keep (as misers pelf)
All this learning to myself;
Sister, to remove this doubt,
Rather than we will fall out,
(If our parents will agree)
You shall Latin learn with me.

It was not until 1815 that Mary Lamb taught herself Latin, and later in life taught it also to Mary Victoria Novello, to Fanny

Kelly, and to William Hazlitt the younger. It is however quite likely that in these early days she had the groundings from her brother.

For a plain description of Christ's Hospital in Lamb's day (or only a few years later) it is safer, I think, to go to Leigh Hunt than to *Elia*. Leigh Hunt entered the school in 1791, two years after Lamb left it, but he knew many of the same boys and the same masters, and little if anything can have changed. Some of the pleasantest pages of his *Autobiography* describe the old school. Here, for example, is his account of the daily round. "Our routine of life was this. We rose to the call of a bell, at six in summer, and seven in winter; and after combing ourselves, and washing our hands and faces, went, at the call of another bell, to breakfast. All this took up about an hour. From breakfast we proceeded to school, where we remained till eleven, winter and summer, and then had an hour's play. Dinner took place at twelve. Afterwards was a little play till one, when we again went to school, and remained till five in summer and four in winter. At six was the supper. We used to play after it in summer till eight. In winter, we proceeded from supper to bed. On Sundays, the school-time of the other days was occupied in church, both morning and evening; and as the Bible was read to us every day before every meal, and on going to bed, besides prayers and graces, we rivalled the monks in the religious part of our duties." We may here see, probably, the main source of Lamb's curious knowledge of the Bible, which he quotes so often with perfect appositeness—and occasionally so whimsically, as in the phrase "the innutritious one in the Canticles" in the essay "New Year's Eve," which is, I take it, a reference to the Song of Solomon, viii. 8.

Coleridge's long letter to his friend Thomas Poole, narrating the circumstances of his early life, gives us a table of the school meals. "Our diet was very scanty. Every morning a bit of dry bread and some bad small beer. Every evening a larger piece of bread, and cheese or butter, whichever we liked. For dinner,—on Sunday, boiled beef and broth; Monday, bread and butter, and milk and water; Tuesday, roast mutton; Wednesday, bread and butter, and rice milk; Thursday, boiled beef and broth; Friday, boiled mutton and broth; Saturday, bread

and butter, and pease-porridge. Our food was portioned; and, excepting on Wednesdays, I never had a bellyfull. Our appetites were damped, never satisfied; and we had no vegetables." In a passage above, and in the account, in Chapter II., of how Aunt Hetty would walk down from the Temple to help out a poor repast with something more sustaining, we have seen that Lamb was not entirely at the mercy of this meagre dietary.

"The Upper and the Lower Grammar Schools," says Lamb in *Elia*, "were held in the same room; and an imaginary line only divided their bounds. Their character was as different as that of the inhabitants on the two sides of the Pyrenees. The Rev. James Boyer was the Upper Master; but the Rev. Matthew Field presided over that portion of the apartment, of which I had the good fortune to be a member. We lived a life as careless as birds. We talked and did just what we pleased, and nobody molested us. We carried an accidence, or a grammar, for form; but, for any trouble it gave us, we might take two years in getting through the verbs deponent, and another two in forgetting all that we had learned about them. There was now and then the formality of saying a lesson, but if you had not learned it, a brush across the shoulders (just enough to disturb a fly) was the sole remonstrance. Field never used the rod; and in truth he wielded the cane with no great good will—holding it 'like a dancer.' It looked in his hands rather like an emblem than an instrument of authority; and an emblem, too, he was ashamed of. He was a good easy man, that did not care to ruffle his own peace, nor perhaps set any great consideration upon the value of juvenile time. He came among us, now and then, but often staid away whole days from us; and when he came, it made no difference to us—he had his private room to retire to, the short time he staid, to be out of the sound of our noise. Our mirth and uproar went on. We had classics of our own, without being beholden to 'insolent Greece or haughty Rome,' that passed current among us—Peter Wilkins—the Adventures of the Hon. Capt. Robert Boyle—the Fortunate Blue Coat Boy—and the like. Or we cultivated a turn for mechanic or scientific operations; making little sun-dials of paper; or weaving those ingenious parentheses, called *cat-cradles;* or making dry peas to dance upon the end of a tin pipe; or studying the art military over

that laudable game 'French and English,' and a hundred other such devices to pass away the time—mixing the useful with the agreeable—as would have made the souls of Rousseau and John Locke chuckle to have seen us.

"Matthew Field belonged to that class of modest divines who affect to mix in equal proportion the *gentleman*, the *scholar*, and the *Christian;* but, I know not how, the first ingredient is generally found to be the predominating dose in the composition. He was engaged in gay parties, or with his courtly bow at some episcopal levée, when he should have been attending upon us. He had for many years the classical charge of a hundred children, during the four or five first years of their education; and his very highest form seldom proceeded further than two or three of the introductory fables of Phædrus. How things were suffered to go on thus, I cannot guess. Boyer, who was the proper person to have remedied these abuses, always affected, perhaps felt, a delicacy in interfering in a province not strictly his own. I have not been without my suspicions, that he was not altogether displeased at the contrast we presented to his end of the school. We were a sort of Helots to his young Spartans. He would sometimes, with ironic deference, send to borrow a rod of the Under Master, and then, with sardonic grin, observe to one of his upper boys, 'how neat and fresh the twigs looked.' While his pale students were battering their brains over Xenophon and Plato, with a silence as deep as that enjoined by the Samite, we were enjoying ourselves at our ease in our little Goshen. We saw a little into the secrets of his discipline, and the prospect did but the more reconcile us to our lot. His thunders rolled innocuous for us; his storms came near, but never touched us; contrary to Gideon's miracle, while all around were drenched, our fleece was dry. His boys turned out the better scholars; we, I suspect, have the advantage in temper. His pupils cannot speak of him without something of terror allaying their gratitude; the remembrance of Field comes back with all the soothing images of indolence, and summer slumbers, and work like play, and innocent idleness, and Elysian exemptions, and life itself a 'playing holiday.'"

Coleridge tells us nothing of Field, but Leigh Hunt amusingly supplements Lamb's description. "The under grammar-master,

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL. THE WRITING SCHOOL

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY THE REV. D. F. HEYWOOD SHORTLY BEFORE THE DEMOLITION

in my time, was the Rev. Mr. Field. He was a good-looking man, very gentlemanly, and always dressed at the neatest. I believe he once wrote a play. He had the reputation of being admired by the ladies. A man of a more handsome incompetence for his situation perhaps did not exist. He came late of a morning; went away soon in the afternoon; and used to walk up and down, languidly bearing his cane, as if it were a lily, and hearing our eternal *Dominuses* and *As in præsentis* with an air of ineffable endurance. Often he did not hear at all. It was a joke with us, when any of our friends came to the door, and we asked his permission to go to them, to address him with some preposterous question wide of the mark; to which he used to assent. We would say, for instance, 'Are you not a great fool, sir?' or, 'Isn't your daughter a pretty girl?' to which he would reply, 'Yes, child.' When he condescended to hit us with the cane, he made a face as if he were taking physic."

Here is Lamb on the other master—the Rev. James Boyer. "B. was a rabid pedant. His English style was crampt to barbarism. His Easter anthems (for his duty obliged him to those periodical flights) were grating as scrannel pipes. He would laugh, ay, and heartily, but then it must be at Flaccus's quibble about *Rex*—— or at the *tristis severitas in vultu*, or *inspicere in patinas*, of Terence—thin jests, which at their first broaching could hardly have had *vis* enough to move a Roman muscle.—He had two wigs, both pedantic, but of differing omen. The one serene, smiling, fresh powdered, betokening a mild day. The other, an old discoloured, unkempt, angry caxon, denoting frequent and bloody execution. Woe to the school, when he made his morning appearance in his *passy*, or *passionate wig*. No comet expounded surer.—J. B. had a heavy hand. I have known him double his knotty fist at a poor trembling child (the maternal milk hardly dry upon its lips) with a 'Sirrah, do you presume to set your wits at me?'—Nothing was more common than to see him make a head-long entry into the school-room, from his inner recess, or library, and, with turbulent eye, singling out a lad, roar out, 'Od's my life, Sirrah,' (his favourite adjuration) 'I have a great mind to whip you,'—then, with as sudden a retracting impulse, fling back into his lair—and, after a cooling lapse of some minutes (during which all but the culprit had totally forgotten the context) drive headlong out again, piecing out his

imperfect sense, as if it had been some Devil's Litany, with the expletory yell—'*and I* WILL, *too.*'—In his gentler moods, when the *rabidus furor* was assuaged, he had resort to an ingenious method, peculiar, for what I have heard, to himself, of whipping the boy, and reading the Debates, at the same time; a paragraph, and a lash between; which in those times, when parliamentary oratory was most at a height and flourishing in these realms, was not calculated to impress the patient with a veneration for the diffuser graces of rhetoric.

"Once, and but once, the uplifted rod was known to fall ineffectual from his hand—when droll squinting W—— having been caught putting the inside of the master's desk to a use for which the architect had clearly not designed it, to justify himself, with great simplicity averred, that *he did not know that the thing had been forewarned.* This exquisite irrecognition of any law antecedent to the *oral* or *declaratory*, struck so irresistibly upon the fancy of all who heard it (the pedagogue himself not excepted) that remission was unavoidable. . . . Perhaps we cannot dismiss him better than with the pious ejaculation of C.—when he heard that his old master was on his death-bed—'Poor J. B.!—may all his faults be forgiven; and may he be wafted to bliss by little cherub boys, all head and wings, with no *bottoms* to reproach his sublunary infirmities.'"

Lamb speaks of himself as only a Deputy Grecian, and yet there is no doubt that he enjoyed the advantage of Boyer's tuition, even although that masterful instructor reserved his highest enthusiasm for Grecians absolute. Lamb's character sketch of Boyer is undoubtedly the result of personal study; but there is further and perhaps better evidence in the manuscript book in which, as Trollope tells us in his *History of Christ's Hospital*, it was Boyer's practice to allow his scholars to transcribe exercises of "more than ordinary merit." In this book Coleridge wrote the verses "Julia," "Quæ nocent docent," "Progress of Vice," and his "Monody on Chatterton," and here in 1789 Lamb wrote the lines that follow, his earliest composition of which we have any knowledge:—

MILLE VIÆ MORTIS

What time in bands of slumber all were laid,
To Death's dark court, methought I was convey'd;
In realms it lay far hid from mortal sight,
And gloomy tapers scarce kept out the night.

THE REV. JAMES BOYER AND A "GRECIAN"

DETAIL FROM THE PICTURE OF ST. MATTHEW'S DAY AT CHRIST'S HOSPITAL, PAINTED IN 1799 BY T. STOTHARD, R.A., ENGRAVED BY J. G. WALKER

On ebon throne the King of Terrors sate,
Around him stood the ministers of Fate;
On fell destruction bent, the murth'rous band
Waited attentively his high command.

Here pallid Fear and dark Despair were seen,
And Fever here with looks forever lean,
Swoln Dropsy, halting Gout, profuse of woes,
And Madness fierce and hopeless of repose,

Wide-wasting Plague; but chief in honour stood
More-wasting War, insatiable of blood;
With starting eye-balls, eager for the word;
Already brandish'd was the glitt'ring sword.

Wonder and fear alike had fill'd my breast,
And thus the grisly Monarch I addrest—

"Of earth-born Heroes why should poets sing,
"And thee neglect, neglect the greatest King?
"To thee ev'n Cæsar's self was forc'd to yield
"The glories of Pharsalia's well-fought field."

When, with a frown, "Vile caitiff, come not here!"
Abrupt cried Death; "shall flatt'ry soothe my ear?"
"Hence, or thou feel'st my dart!" the Monarch said.
Wild terror seiz'd me, and the vision fled.

The discovery of these stanzas was an achievement of the late Mr. Dykes Campbell, and I reproduce his remarks both upon the poem and also upon the book which contained it. "The verses, perhaps, are not conspicuously better than the average of such compositions, though I am fain to detect in them the savour of a somewhat rarer herbage than that on which the normal clever schoolboy is content to browse; but this may be but a fancy, and I will not insist on it. To such rough-and-ready critical apparatus as I am able to apply, Lamb's 'Mille Viæ Mortis' yields as little promise of 'Hester' or 'The Old Familiar Faces' as Coleridge's 'Julia' of 'Christabel;' but it would not be surprising if a more delicate test gave a different result. For the development of Lamb's critical taste was years in advance of Coleridge's—as may be seen by his letters to his friend in 1796, when Lamb was twenty-one and Coleridge twenty-four."

Of the book itself Mr. Dykes Campbell continues: "It begins with 1783, when Boyer had been already head master for seven years, and it ends with his year of retirement, 1799. It contains in all sixty-five compositions, of which forty-six are in verse and nineteen in prose. The authors were all Grecians but three, and

all 'Exhibitioners' (sent to Oxford or Cambridge at the charge of the Hospital) but four—namely, John Maund, Charles Lamb, B. Oviatt, and W. Thompson. Maund was the Grecian who was not an Exhibitioner—the 'ill-fated M ——' of the 'Elia' essay. Of him and of another, Henry Scott, also ill-fated, who contributed thrice to the book, Lamb says 'the Muse is silent,' and adapts Prior thus—

> Finding some of Edward's race
> Unhappy, pass their annals by.

Of Oviatt and W. Thompson no record is available. But here are Lancelot Pepys Stephens, 'kindest of boys and men;' and Trollope, afterwards head master—these two the Damon and Pythias of the institution;" and also Middleton, Thornton, the two Le Grices, Bob Allen and Franklin. "All Lamb's Grecians," Mr. Dykes Campbell continues, "wrote in Boyer's book, and some of Hunt's. His strange, eerie 'C——n' was doubtless Cheslyn; and there is Pitman, who visited Hunt in prison, and became Reader to our Queen when she was Princess Victoria; and Cautley, who had a distinguished career at Cambridge, and to whom, for auld lang syne, Pitman dedicated his Latin Anthology; and John Wood, who was Hunt's 'kind giant,' but who proved, in the cold daylight of his Fellow's rooms at Pembroke, when Hunt visited him at Cambridge, to be a head shorter than his visitor. All these wrote and are written in the 'Liber Aureus' of their noble foundation, but of them all only two, Coleridge and Lamb, in that whose 'golden clasps lock in the golden story' of our national literature."[1]

The Church was the natural end of all Grecians, although Coleridge, Allen, Favell and the younger Le Grice, at any rate, among Lamb's particular friends, succeeded in evading such a destiny. The understanding that holy orders should follow the Grecian rank kept Lamb among the Deputy Grecians: the impediment in his speech, from which he never recovered, and which probably was at its worst in his boyhood, being considered an insuperable obstacle.[2] Posterity has reason to bless

[1] *Illustrated London News*, December 26, 1891.

[2] In what is perhaps the quaintest "literary" novel that has yet been written, a story, by an American lady, entitled *In the Days of Lamb and Coleridge*, which shows considerable research among the documents of the case and a not less diligent invention, the reader is spared nothing of Lamb's conversational infirmity. Many persons thus afflicted hesitate only before labials or dentals; Lamb (in this novel) boggles at all alike. And Coleridge calls him "Cholley."

that stutter. Not that the Church would necessarily have wholly de-Elianated him (the author of *Tristram Shandy* was a clergyman); but one cannot see the Rev. Charles Lamb producing quite such work as came from Charles Lamb of the East India House, and the least differences are not to be thought of. Wordsworth, however, felt otherwise. In his note to his "Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg" he wrote: "Lamb was a good Latin scholar, and probably would have gone to college upon one of the School foundations but for the impediment in his speech. Had such been his lot, he would have probably been preserved from the indulgences of social humours and fancies which were often injurious to himself and causes of severe regret to his friends, without really benefitting the object of his misapplied kindness."

Writing in 1831 to George Dyer, who had been a Grecian when Lamb was a child, Lamb recalls his old state as a Deputy: "You ever wrote what I call a Grecian's hand; what the Grecians write (or used) at Christ's Hospital; such as Whalley would have admired, and Boyer have applauded, but Smith or Atwood (writing-masters) would have horsed you for. Your boy-of-genius hand and your mercantile hand are various. By your flourishes, I should think you never learned to make eagles or corkscrews, or flourish the governors' names in the writing-school; and by the tenor and cut of your letters I suspect you were never in it at all. . . . Mine is a sort of deputy Grecian's hand; a little better, and more of a worldly hand, than a Grecian's, but still remote from the mercantile. I don't know how it is, but I keep my rank in fancy still since school-days. I can never forget I was a deputy Grecian! And writing to you, or to Coleridge, besides affection, I feel a reverential deference as to Grecians still. I keep my soaring way above the Great Erasmians, yet far beneath the other. Alas! what am I now? what is a Leadenhall clerk or India pensioner to a deputy Grecian? How art thou fallen, O Lucifer!"

Here I quote Leigh Hunt again: "'But what is a Deputy Grecian?' Ah, reader! to ask that question, and at the same time to know anything at all worth knowing, would at one time, according to our notion of things, have been impossible. When I entered the school, I was shown three gigantic boys, young men rather (for the eldest was between seventeen and eighteen),

who, I was told, were going to the University. These were the Grecians. They were the three head boys of the Grammar School, and were understood to have their destiny fixed for the Church. The next class to these, like a College of Cardinals to those three Popes (for every Grecian was in our eyes infallible), were the Deputy Grecians. The former were supposed to have completed their Greek studies, and were deep in Sophocles and Euripides. The latter were thought equally competent to tell you anything respecting Homer and Demosthenes. These two classes, and the head boys of the Navigation School, held a certain rank over the whole place, both in school and out."

To return to Boyer. In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge wrote well of the terrible J. B., whom he always calls, inaccurately, Bowyer. "At School (Christ's Hospital), I enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a very sensible, though at the same time a very severe master, the Reverend James Bowyer. He early moulded my taste to the preference of Demosthenes to Cicero, of Homer and Theocritus to Virgil, and again of Virgil to Ovid. He habituated me to compare Lucretius (in such extracts as I then read), Terence, and, above all, the chaster poems of Catullus, not only with the Roman poets of the so-called silver and brazen ages, but with even those of the Augustan æra: and on grounds of plain sense and universal logic to see and assert the superiority of the former in the truth and nativeness both of their thoughts and diction.

"At the same time that we were studying the Greek tragic poets, he made us read Shakespeare and Milton as lessons: and they were the lessons, too, which required most time and trouble to *bring up*, so as to escape his censure. I learned from him that poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive, causes. In the truly great poets, he would say, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word; and I well remember that, availing himself of the synonymes to the Homer of Didymus, he made us attempt to show, with regard to each, why it would not have answered the same purpose; and wherein consisted the peculiar fitness of the word in the original text.

"In our own English compositions (at least for the last three

years of our school education,) he showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image, unsupported by a sound sense, or where the same sense might have been conveyed with equal force and dignity in plainer words. *Lute*, *harp*, and *lyre*, *Muse*, *Muses*, and *inspirations*, *Pegasus*, *Parnassus* and *Hippocrene*, were all an abomination to him. In fancy I can almost hear him now exclaiming, 'Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, Muse? Your nurse's daughter, you mean! Pierian spring? Oh aye! the cloister-pump, I suppose!'"

In the *Table Talk* Coleridge gives us another glimpse of this beneficent tyrant. "'Boy!' I remember Bowyer saying to me once when I was crying the first day of my return after the holidays, 'Boy! the school is your father! Boy! the school is your mother! Boy! the school is your brother! the school is your sister! the school is your first cousin, and your second-cousin, and all the rest of your relations! Let's have no more crying!'

"No tongue," Coleridge also says, "can express good Mrs. Bowyer. Val. Le Grice and I were going to be flogged for some domestic misdeeds, and Bowyer was thundering away at us by way of prologue, when Mrs. B. looked in, and said, 'Flog them soundly, sir, I beg!' This saved us. Bowyer was so nettled at the interruption that he growled out, 'Away, woman! away!' and we were let off."

Writing to Coleridge in 1814, Lamb says, "Old Jimmy Boyer is dead at last. Trollope has got his living, worth £1000 a-year net. See, thou sluggard, thou heretic-sluggard, what mightest thou not have arrived at! Lay thy animosity against Jimmy in the grave. Do not *entail* it on thy posterity"—a pleasantry in the manner of S. T. C.'s own, quoted above.

Leigh Hunt again helps to fill in the picture: "The other master, the upper one, Boyer—famous for the mention of him by Coleridge and Lamb—was a short stout man, inclining to punchiness, with large face and hands, an aquiline nose, long upper lip, and a sharp mouth. His eye was close and cruel. The spectacles which he wore threw a balm over it. Being a clergyman, he dressed in black, with a powdered wig. His clothes were cut short; his hands hung out of the sleeves, with tight wristbands, as if ready for execution; and as he generally wore gray worsted stockings, very tight, with a little balustrade

leg, his whole appearance presented something formidably succinct, hard, and mechanical. In fact, his weak side, and undoubtedly his natural destination, lay in carpentry; and he accordingly carried, in a side-pocket made on purpose, a carpenter's rule. . . .

"One anecdote of his injustice will suffice for all. It is of ludicrous enormity; nor do I believe anything more flagrantly wilful was ever done by himself. I heard Mr. C., the sufferer, now a most respectable person in a Government office, relate it with a due relish, long after quitting the school. The master was in the habit of 'spiting' C.; that is to say, of taking every opportunity to be severe with him; nobody knew why. One day he comes into the school, and finds him placed in the middle of it with three other boys. He was not in one of his worst humours, and did not seem inclined to punish them, till he saw his antagonist. 'Oh, oh! sir,' said he, 'what! you are among them, are you?' and gave him an exclusive thump on the face. He then turned to one of the Grecians, and said, 'I have not time to flog all these boys; make them draw lots, and I'll punish one.' The lots were drawn, and C.'s was favourable. 'Oh, oh!' returned the master, when he saw them, 'you have escaped, have you, sir?' and pulling out his watch, and turning again to the Grecian, observed, that he found he *had* time to punish the whole three; 'and, sir,' added he to C., with another slap, 'I'll begin with *you*.' He then took the boy into the library and flogged him; and, on issuing forth again, had the face to say, with an air of indifference, 'I have not time, after all, to punish these two other boys; let them take care how they provoke me another time.' . . .

"Sometimes, however, our despot got into a dilemma, and then he did not know how to get out of it. A boy, now and then, would be roused into open and fierce remonstrance. I recollect S., afterwards one of the mildest of preachers, starting up in his place, and pouring forth on his astonished hearer a torrent of invectives and threats, which the other could only answer by looking pale, and uttering a few threats in return. Nothing came of it. He did not like such matters to go before the governors. Another time, Favell, a Grecian, a youth of high spirit, whom he had struck, went to the school-door, opened it, and, turning round with the handle in his grasp, told him he

would never set foot again in the place, unless he promised to treat him with more delicacy. 'Come back, child; come back!' said the other, pale, and in a faint voice. There was a dead silence. Favell came back, and nothing more was done."

After Lamb himself, it is to Charles Valentine Le Grice, who wrote some reminiscences of him for Talfourd, that we must go for our knowledge of him in his blue coat. "Lamb," he says, "was an amiable gentle boy, very sensible and keenly observing, indulged by his schoolfellows and by his master on account of his infirmity of speech. His countenance was mild; his complexion clear brown, with an expression which might lead you to think that he was of Jewish descent. His eyes were not each of the same colour, one was hazel, the other had specks of grey in the iris, mingled as we see red spots in the blood-stone. His step was plantigrade, which made his walk slow and peculiar, adding to the staid appearance of his figure. I never heard his name mentioned without the addition of Charles, although, as there was no other boy of the name of Lamb, the addition was unnecessary; but there was an implied kindness in it, and it was a proof that his gentle manners excited that kindness.

"His delicate frame and his difficulty of utterance, which was increased by agitation, unfitted him for joining in any boisterous sport. The description which he gives, in his 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital,' of the habits and feelings of the schoolboy, is a true one in general, but is more particularly a delineation of himself—the feelings were all in his own heart—the portrait was his own: 'While others were all fire and play, he stole along with all the self-concentration of a young monk.' These habits and feelings were awakened and cherished in him by peculiar circumstances: he had been born and bred in the Inner Temple; and his parents continued to reside there while he was at school, so that he passed from cloister to cloister, and this was all the change his young mind ever knew. On every half-holiday (and there were two in the week) in ten minutes he was in the gardens, on the terrace, or at the fountain of the Temple: here was his home, here his recreation; and the influence they had on his infant mind is vividly shown in his description of the Old Benchers."

So much for the little Charles Lamb outwardly. We have a

glimpse of him within in the *Elia* essay "New Year's Eve," where, nearly forty years afterwards, he thus recalled the spiritual side of his boyhood. "For the child Elia—that 'other me,' there, in the back-ground—I must take leave to cherish the remembrance of that young master—with as little reference, I protest, to this stupid changeling of five-and-forty, as if it had been a child of some other house, and not of my parents. . . . I can lay its poor fevered head upon the sick pillow at Christ's, and wake with it in surprise at the gentle posture of maternal tenderness hanging over it, that unknown had watched its sleep. I know how it shrank from any the least colour of falsehood. . . . I know how honest, how courageous (for a weakling) it was—how religious, how imaginative, how hopeful!"

Chief among Lamb's schoolfellows, both in interest and friendliness to himself, was Coleridge. Writing in 1820, Lamb says, in a passage that must have brought tears to the eyes of his friend: "Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard!—How have I seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, intranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the *speech* and the *garb* of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar—while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy!*" Of Coleridge we shall see so much in the pages that follow—his life being for a while so closely associated with Lamb's—that there is no need to say more here.

Next to Coleridge, Valentine Le Grice must have been most congenial to Lamb on the intellectual side. We may gather this from Le Grice's writings, brief as they are; from his addiction to fun and punning; and from Lamb's occasional mention in the essays and letters. "Many," says Lamb, also in the *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital, "were the 'wit-combats,' (to dally awhile with the words of old Fuller,) between him [Coleridge] and C. V. Le G——, 'which two I behold like a Spanish great

gallion, and an English man of war; Master Coleridge, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid, but slow in his performances. C. V. L., with the English man of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.'" We are given another glimpse of Le Grice in the essay "Grace before Meat": "I do not quite approve of the epigrammatic conciseness with which that equivocal wag (but my pleasant school-fellow) C. V. L., when importuned for a grace, used to inquire, first slyly leering down the table, 'Is there no clergyman here?'—significantly adding, 'Thank G——.'"

There is in Henry Gunning's *Reminiscences of Cambridge* a story of Le Grice which is quite in the spirit of Lamb himself: "During the Vice-Chancellorship of Dr. Yates, a circumstance occurred which, had it not been for the extreme good nature of the Vice-Chancellor, might have been attended with very unpleasant consequences to the principal actor in it. In order that the matter may be understood, it is necessary to say a few words respecting the figure of the Vice-Chancellor. He was low in stature, remarkably fat, his form was spherical, and his legs extremely short and thick: he appeared to a person following him not very unlike a turtle walking on his hind legs. I was accompanying him to St. Mary's on a Saint's day, when I heard the sound of a very jovial party breakfasting on King's Parade. One of them looking out of the window saw us approach; and before we got opposite the house, they all joined in a very loud and noisy song, of which the following words could be very distinctly heard:—

'Gadzoons! gadzoons!
Lowther Yates in pantaloons!'

"These words were often repeated. The Vice-Chancellor directed me to cross the street; and on Mrs. Perry coming to the door, he demanded to see the lodger who was giving the entertainment. Charles Valentine Le Grice, of Trinity, made his appearance. The Vice-Chancellor, highly excited, asked what he meant by insulting him; to this he replied that there was not the most distant idea of insulting him, but that as they were singing, *somehow or other* his name slipped into the song.

We then left him and went to St. Mary's, having ascertained his name and college. As soon as I had left the Vice-Chancellor at his Lodge, I called upon Le Grice, with whom I had a slight acquaintance; I urged him to wait upon the Vice-Chancellor immediately, and to make the best apology in his power for the insult of which he had been guilty.

"He followed my advice, and found the Vice-Chancellor at first too angry to listen to any excuse; but by degrees he softened, and said, 'If I were to forgive you, Sir, the story would be all over the University before the evening.' 'True,' replied Le Grice, 'but the story of your clemency would accompany it wherever it went!' The kind-hearted old man forgave him."

Crabb Robinson records in his *Diary* two stories of Le Grice, told him by Lamb, both in reference to a Debating Society which they attended together—possibly in the school, but more probably a London society, like the Cogers', during Le Grice's vacations. On one occasion he began a speech by remarking genially, "The last time I had the pleasure of addressing the Chair in this Hall, I was kicked out of the room." At another time the question before the meeting was, "Who was the greatest orator—Pitt, Fox, or Burke?" Le Grice was equal to it: "I heard a lady, to the question, 'Which do you like best—Beef, veal, or mutton,' say 'Pork.' So I, in reply to your question, answer *Sheridan*."

In Le Grice's odd career the promise of his youth was in no way fulfilled. His father was a clergyman at Bury St. Edmunds. Born in 1773, Le Grice was just two years older than Lamb. On leaving Christ's Hospital as Senior Grecian, he passed to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he wrote one or two clever and original squibs. In 1796, as we learn in Lamb's first letter to Coleridge, he became tutor to the son of a wealthy widow in Cornwall—Mrs. William Nicholls of Trereife; in 1798 he was ordained; in 1799 he married Mrs. Nicholls and became a wealthy man. Young Nicholls died in 1815, Mrs. Le Grice died in 1821, and Le Grice inherited all the property, and lived on the Trereife estate until 1858. He was eccentric and opinionated, and was engaged almost continually in diocesan strife. His only enduring work is his translation of Longus, published in 1803.

As a boy at school, Le Grice spent some of his holidays at

the Lambs', and Lamb and he seem to have forgathered after, especially between his leaving Cambridge and departing for Cornwall in 1796; but after this they did not meet until 1834, when they dined together at the Bell at Edmonton. In May 1838 Le Grice contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* some reminiscences of Coleridge and Lamb, containing the following admirable criticism of Lamb's humour: "With him the natural passions had room to play; and his wit, flashing out of his melancholy, was as the summer lightning playing innocuously round the very cloud which gave it birth. And thus it is the overburdened spirit relieves itself: a pun may discharge a whole load of sorrow; the sharp point of a quibble or a joke may let out the long-gathered waters of bitterness. We want no Hamlets to teach us this. We need no *Sternes* to tell us how thoughts and imaginings, pensive and jocose, alternate and play across each other and intermingle in the mind. This was Lamb's wit—it kept apart by itself. It did not sharpen the arrows of satire, it did not grin with a provoking malice, it did not thirst for reward, it did not cater to vanity, it did not live on adulation. It was his own quiet possession and delight. It had no fellowship with the Footes, the Sheridans, the Colmans of the day. It rose higher, as it sprang from a greater depth than theirs; but it held acquaintance with—it paid a becoming deference to the wits and wise men of old. It shook Master Shallow by the hand: it pulled off its cap in the presence of Sir Thomas Browne; helped old Fuller to his great arm-chair; eat a pippin and carraways with Mr. Justice Shallow in his garden; walked arm-in-arm between Bunyan and Bishop Patrick; loved the old playwrights dearly, and the name of Bankside; would converse with Jewell and Fox and the primitive quakers; read Homer in Chapman and not in Pope; would be seen bending gracefully on knee to the Duchess of Newcastle, like a page in one of Vandyck's pictures; and everywhere it smacked rarely of antiquity; and had an equal command over our tears and smiles. Being thus, it will endure." It is a pity that the man who could write with such discernment as this should have wasted his time and energy in theological rancour.

In his *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital Lamb has told us much of his old schoolfellows. Leigh Hunt, in his *Autobio-*

*graphy*, again supplements certain of his descriptions. Thus of poor Samuel Le Grice, Valentine's brother, whom Lamb calls "sanguine, volatile and sweet natured," Leigh Hunt remarks: "He was the maddest of all the great boys in my time; clever, full of address, and not hampered with modesty. Remote rumours, not lightly to be heard, fell on our ears, respecting pranks of his amongst the nurses' daughters. He had a fair handsome face, with delicate aquiline nose, and twinkling eyes. I remember his astonishing me when I was 'a new boy,' with sending me for a bottle of water, which he proceeded to pour down the back of G., a grave Deputy Grecian. On the master asking him one day why he, of all the boys, had given up no exercise (it was a particular exercise that they were bound to do in the course of a long set of holidays), he said he had had 'a lethargy.' The extreme impudence of this puzzled the master; and, I believe, nothing came of it. . . .

"Le Grice was in the habit of eating apples in school-time, for which he had been often rebuked. One day, having particularly pleased the master, the latter, who was eating apples himself, and who would now and then with great ostentation present a boy with some halfpenny token of his mansuetude, called out to his favourite of the moment, 'Le Grice, here is an apple for you.' Le Grice, who felt his dignity hurt as a Grecian, but was more pleased at having this opportunity of mortifying his reprover, replied, with an exquisite tranquillity of assurance, 'Sir, I never eat apples.' For this, among other things, the boys adored him. Poor fellow! He and Favell (who, though very generous, was said to be a little too sensible of an humble origin) wrote to the Duke of York, when they were at College, for commissions in the army. The Duke good-naturedly sent them. Le Grice died in the West Indies. Favell was killed in one of the battles in Spain, but not before he had distinguished himself as an officer and a gentleman."

Of Favell Lamb writes in two places. In the Christ's Hospital essay he calls him, "dogged, faithful, anticipative of insult, warm-hearted, with something of the old Roman height about him." And again in "Poor Relations" under feigned conditions he again describes his sensitiveness. Both Sam Le Grice and Favell decided to throw in their lot with Coleridge, Southey, Lovell, Burnett and any other enthusiasts there might be, in the

great scheme of Pantisocracy. Favell was even moved to poetry on the subject.

We find Bob Allen also both in Lamb and in Leigh Hunt. In the Christ's Hospital essay it is written: "Nor shalt thou, their compeer, be quickly forgotten, Allen, with the cordial smile, and still more cordial laugh, with which thou wert wont to make the old Cloisters shake, in thy cognition of some poignant jest of theirs; or the anticipation of some more material, and, peradventure, practical one, of thine own. Extinct are those smiles, with that beautiful countenance, with which (for thou wert the *Nireus formosus* of the school), in the days of thy maturer waggery, thou didst disarm the wrath of infuriated town-damsel, who, incensed by provoking pinch, turning tigress-like round, suddenly converted by thy angel-look, exchanged the half-formed terrible '*bl*——,' for a gentler greeting—'*bless thy handsome face!*'" Leigh Hunt tells the same story.

Allen's career was a varied one. He was born in 1772, and was thus between two and three years older than Lamb. On leaving school as a Grecian he went to University College, Oxford, where, in his rooms, Coleridge first met Southey, in 1794. Another of his friends at this time was John Stoddart, afterwards Hazlitt's brother-in-law, destined also to have association with Lamb. It is possible also that Lamb's first acquaintance with William Godwin was due to Allen, for in 1796 we find him telling Coleridge that Stoddart and Godwin are influencing Allen so undesirably that he has become a sceptic. Allen married a widow with daughters as old as himself, a match which Lamb deplored. In 1796, however, the widow died, and in the next year Allen was appointed Deputy Surgeon to the Second Royals, in Portugal. In 1802 he was with Stoddart at the Lakes and in Scotland, by which time he was probably free of his army duties. Later we know from Lamb that he was a journalist. In the *Elia* essay on "Newspapers" is this amusing passage: "While we were wringing out coy sprightlinesses for the Post [in 1802-03], and writhing under the toil of what is called 'easy writing,' Bob Allen, our *quondam* schoolfellow, was tapping his impracticable brains in a like service for the 'Oracle.' Not that Robert troubled himself much about wit. If his paragraphs had a sprightly air about them, it was sufficient. He carried this nonchalance so far at

last, that a matter of intelligence, and that no very important one, was not seldom palmed upon his employers for a good jest; for example sake—'*Walking yesterday morning casually down Snow Hill, who should we meet but Mr. Deputy Humphreys! we rejoice to add, that the worthy Deputy appeared to enjoy a good state of health. We do not remember ever to have seen him look better.*' This gentleman, so surprisingly met upon Snow Hill, from some peculiarities in gait or gesture, was a constant butt for mirth to the small paragraph-mongers of the day; and our friend thought that he might have his fling at him with the rest. We met A. in Holborn shortly after this extraordinary rencounter, which he told with tears of satisfaction in his eyes, and chuckling at the anticipated effects of its announcement next day in the paper. We did not quite comprehend where the wit of it lay at the time; nor was it easy to be detected, when the thing came out, advantaged by type and letter-press. He had better have met any thing that morning than a Common Council Man. His services were shortly after dispensed with, on the plea that his paragraphs of late had been deficient in point. The one in question, it must be owned, had an air, in the opening especially, proper to awaken curiosity; and the sentiment, or moral, wears the aspect of humanity, and good neighbourly feeling. But somehow the conclusion was not judged altogether to answer to the magnificent promise of the premises.

"We traced our friend's pen afterwards in the 'True Briton,' the 'Star,' the 'Traveller,'—from all which he was successively dismissed, the Proprietors having 'no further occasion for his services.' Nothing was easier than to detect him. When wit failed, or topics ran low, there constantly appeared the following—'*It is not generally known that the three Blue Balls at the Pawnbrokers' shops are the ancient arms of Lombardy. The Lombards were the first money-brokers in Europe.*' Bob has done more to set the public right on this important point of blazonry, than the whole College of Heralds."

Allen died of apoplexy in 1805. By virtue of this brief passage in his schoolfellow's essay his immortality is secure.

Among the schoolfellows mentioned by Lamb with whom he probably had no intercourse in after years, and very little when at Christ's Hospital, was Thomas Fanshawe Middleton,

first Bishop of Calcutta, who is commemorated at the school to day, with Lamb and Coleridge, by a statuette called the Coleridge Memorial, which is held (like an athletic trophy) by the Ward that has gained most prizes during the year. The memorial illustrates the story of Middleton, then a Deputy Grecian, finding Coleridge one day reading Virgil in the playground, and on asking if it were a task, receiving the reply that it was a pleasure. Middleton told Boyer, and the incident was the beginning of Boyer's interest in Coleridge.

Other schoolfellows of Lamb who cannot have been much more than names to him, were Lancelot Pepys Stevens, afterwards a famous grammar master at the school; Sir Edward Thornton the diplomatist; and George Richards, the author of several volumes of poetry, who in 1791 won Earl Harcourt's prize for a poem on the aboriginal Britons.

To-day Christ's Hospital is no more. New buildings are to stand on its site, and the boys are taught in the Sussex weald. The memory of Lamb and Coleridge will, however, always be kept sweet in the school. Pride in such scholars would persist under any changes, without the tangible support that is given by the Coleridge Memorial, or the Lamb medals, struck in 1875 on the centenary of Lamb's birth, one of which is awarded every year to the writer of the best English essay. Two of the new school-houses at Horsham are called after Lamb.

A little while ago I heard a story which illustrates the affectionate regard in which Lamb's name is held. A blue-coat boy, walking through a residential street in London, was astonished to hear himself hailed by a strange, bareheaded, elderly gentleman standing on a doorstep. "Come here, boy," he cried, "come here;" and when the boy reached him he pressed a five-shilling piece in his hand, with the words, "In memory of Charles Lamb."

## CHAPTER VI

### JOSEPH PAICE AND ALICE W——

### 1790-1794

Thomas Coventry—Joseph Paice—Lamb at 27 Bread Street Hill—The South-Sea House—The Odd Fishes' Influence—Samuel Salt's Death—7 Little Queen Street—The Early Spring of 1792 and Alice W—— —The East India House—"Mr. Guy"—Lamb as a Playgoer.

LAMB left Christ's Hospital on November 23rd, 1789, aged nearly fifteen. The next date in his life of which we have certain knowledge is September 1st, 1791, when his term at the South-Sea House probably began. A chapter in a book called *Family Pictures* by Miss Anne Manning (better known as the author of *Mary Powell*) helps us to fill in the interim; but first it is necessary to glance at another of the Lambs' friends, or at any rate patrons, in the Temple—Thomas Coventry—because according to Miss Manning it was to this old and crusted lawyer, one of Samuel Salt's associates, and with him a Governor of Christ's Hospital, that Charles Lamb in part owed his first employment. He is thus described in *Elia*: "Thomas Coventry was a cadet of the noble family of that name. He passed his youth in contracted circumstances, which gave him early those parsimonious habits which in after-life never forsook him; so that, with one windfall or another, about the time I knew him, he was master of four or five hundred thousand pounds; nor did he look, or walk, worth a moidore less. He lived in a gloomy house opposite the pump in Serjeant's-inn, Fleet-street. . . . C. had an agreeable seat at North Cray, where he seldom spent above a day or two at a time in the summer; but preferred, during the hot months, standing at his window in this damp, close, well-like mansion, to watch, as he said, 'the maids drawing water all day long.' I suspect he had his within-door reasons for the preference.

*Hic currus et arma fuêre.* He might think his treasures more safe. His house had the aspect of a strong box.

"C. was a close hunks—a hoarder rather than a miser—or, if a miser, none of the mad Elwes breed, who have brought discredit upon a character, which cannot exist without certain admirable points of steadiness and unity of purpose. One may hate a true miser, but cannot, I suspect, so easily despise him. By taking care of the pence, he is often enabled to part with the pounds, upon a scale that leaves us careless generous fellows halting at an immeasurable distance behind. C. gave away 30,000*l.* at once in his life-time to a blind charity. His housekeeping was severely looked after, but he kept the table of a gentleman. He would know who came in and who went out of his house, but his kitchen chimney was never suffered to freeze."

Of Coventry in the Temple, where the little boy would often have seen him, there is a masterly and vivid description. His person, says Elia, "was a quadrate, his step massy and elephantine, his face square as the lion's, his gait peremptory and path-keeping, indivertible from his way as a moving column, the scarecrow of his inferiors, the brow-beater of equals and superiors, who made a solitude of children wherever he came, for they fled his insufferable presence, as they would have shunned an Elisha bear. His growl was as thunder in their ears, whether he spake to them in mirth or in rebuke, his invitatory notes being, indeed, of all, the most repulsive and horrid. Clouds of snuff, aggravating the natural terrors of his speech, broke from each majestic nostril, darkening the air. He took it, not by pinches, but a palmful at once, diving for it under the mighty flaps of his old-fashioned waistcoat pocket; his waistcoat red and angry, his coat dark rappee, tinctured by dye original, and by adjuncts, with buttons of obsolete gold. And so he paced the terrace."

Among Coventry's friends was a city merchant named Joseph Paice; and one day, says Miss Manning who had the story more or less directly from Mr. Paice, "one day Mr. Coventry said to Mr. Paice, 'There is a lad whom I placed some years since in the Blue Coat School, now on the point of leaving it, and I know not what on earth to do with him.' 'Let him have the run of my counting-house till something better offers,' said Mr. Paice; and accordingly Charles Lamb took his place there, and continued in it till he obtained a clerkship in the

South-Sea House, of which company Mr. Coventry was governor, and Mr. Paice one of the directors." It is, as I have said above, more probable that Samuel Salt, rather than Thomas Coventry, was Lamb's sponsor at Christ's Hospital; but we may take the conversation to be true in substance, even if Miss Manning, who received her information orally, has a faulty detail here and there.

That Lamb was in Paice's office at 27 Bread Street Hill for some time we may feel certain, and it was there that he acquired the knowledge of that gentleman which in after years he recorded, in the essay on "Modern Gallantry," in words that will keep Paice's memory sweet and green for many generations. It is interesting and significant to reflect that the observation on which the character sketch is based was that of a boy of fifteen.

"Joseph Paice, of Bread-street-hill, merchant, and one of the Directors of the South-Sea company—the same to whom Edwards, the Shakspeare commentator, has addressed a fine sonnet—was the only pattern of consistent gallantry I have met with. He took me under his shelter at an early age, and bestowed some pains upon me. I owe to his precepts and example whatever there is of the man of business (and that is not much) in my composition. It was not his fault that I did not profit more. Though bred a Presbyterian, and brought up a merchant, he was the finest gentleman of his time. He had not *one* system of attention to females in the drawing-room, and *another* in the shop, or at the stall. I do not mean that he made no distinction. But he never lost sight of sex, or overlooked it in the casualties of a disadvantageous situation. I have seen him stand bare-headed—smile if you please—to a poor servant girl, while she has been inquiring of him the way to some street—in such a posture of unforced civility, as neither to embarrass her in the acceptance, nor himself in the offer, of it. He was no dangler, in the common acceptation of the word, after women: but he reverenced and upheld, in every form in which it came before him, *womanhood*. I have seen him—nay, smile not—tenderly escorting a market-woman, whom he had encountered in a shower, exalting his umbrella over her poor basket of fruit, that it might receive no damage, with as much carefulness as if she had been a

Countess. To the reverend form of Female Eld he would yield the wall (though it were to an ancient beggar-woman) with more ceremony than we can afford to show our grandams. He was the Preux Chevalier of Age; the Sir Calidore, or Sir Tristan, to those who have no Calidores or Tristans to defend them. The roses, that had long faded thence, still bloomed for him in those withered and yellow cheeks." Of this courtly Christian gentleman, who died in 1810, much more may be read in Miss Manning's volume. I wish I could transfer some of her description to these pages, but it must not be.

We have no knowledge as to the length of Lamb's engagement in Mr. Paice's office. It may have covered the whole period between school and the South-Sea House, and it may have left him with time to kill either at home or at Blakesware; but on September 1st, 1791, when he was fifteen and a half, his career at the South-Sea House began—a sojourn which, though of very brief duration, was destined thirty years later to give the keynote to the Essays of Elia and provide the essayist with his pseudonym.

In the Albert Museum at Exeter is preserved the following document:—

Recd 8th feby. 1792 of the Honble South Sea Company by the hands of their Secretary Twelve pounds 1*s.* 6*d.* for 23 weeks attendance in the Examiners Office

£12 : 1 : 6 CHAS. LAMB.

This tells us that Lamb's work was in the Examiner's office, very possibly under the eye of his brother John, whose whole life was spent in the Company's service; that he had entered the office on September 1st, 1791; and that his salary was half a guinea a week.

When, in 1820, at the age of forty-five, Lamb was invited to contribute essays to the newly established *London Magazine*, he began his famous series with a paper of recollections of the clerks whom he saw about him during these five months. The portraiture is intensely vivid and is fortified by a number of minute details that must, I think, have been acquired later, either from information supplied by Lamb's brother, who was subsequently to rise to the height of Accountant, with a suite of rooms in the building, or from observations made at John Lamb's evening parties. If, however, I am mistaken, and Lamb wrote,

at the age of forty-five, the South-Sea essay entirely from impressions gathered when he was sixteen, it is one of the most remarkable feats in literature of what might be called imaginative memory.

Lamb's five months' sojourn among this curious little band of men was probably not without its influence on his character. "They were," he says of the clerks, "mostly bachelors. Generally (for they had not much to do) persons of a curious and speculative turn of mind. Old-fashioned, for a reason mentioned before. Humorists, for they were of all descriptions; and, not having been brought together in early life (which has a tendency to assimilate the members of corporate bodies to each other), but, for the most part, placed in this house in ripe or middle age, they necessarily carried into it their separate habits and oddities, unqualified, if I may so speak, as into a common stock. Hence they formed a sort of Noah's ark. Odd fishes. A lay-monastery. Domestic retainers in a great house, kept more for show than use. Yet pleasant fellows, full of chat—and not a few among them had arrived at considerable proficiency on the German flute."

Charles Lamb's mind was fairly well developed from the first, and would probably have been much the same throughout his life whatever his experiences had been; but I think that we may thank the South-Sea House for a little of his precious whimsicality and quaint humour. So impressionable and appreciative a student of humanity could not, at the age of sixteen, have lived among these odd fishes without borrowing a little from them, or at any rate gaining the courage of idiosyncrasy.

We have seen that Lamb left the South-Sea House on February 8th, 1792—at least we may suppose from so unusual a date for settling an account that his engagement then terminated. My impression is that he was called home in order to help his family in the confusion that had come upon them by the death of Samuel Salt, which occurred in that month. Mr. Salt's thoughtfulness for his old companions showed itself in his will, dated 1786. To his servant John Lamb, "who has lived with me near forty years," he left £500 South-Sea Stock, and by a codicil in 1787 he directed also that his exchequer annuities of £210 and £14 should be received by John Lamb, who should be paid by the executors £10 a year for his trouble. To Mrs. Lamb he left two sums of £100 each, one of which was "well

THE SOUTH-SEA HOUSE

FROM *THE MICROCOSM OF LONDON*

deserved for her care and attention during my illness"—not his last illness, but one previous to making the will in 1786.

What savings the Lambs had, or whether their income was augmented by any contribution from John Lamb the younger, we do not know. All that we know with certainty is that Mary Lamb soon after this time was occupied as a mantua-maker. The family probably very soon left the Temple. Whether they moved immediately to Little Queen Street, the first new home of which we have any knowledge, I have not discovered, but in 1794 they were at No. 7 in that thoroughfare, which used to run south from High Holborn (by the Holborn Restaurant), and is now merged in Kingsway. Horwood's map of London in 1799 shows the exact site of No. 7. It is probable that part of Holy Trinity Church covers the site, though I fancy that the verger of that temple is inaccurate in his statement that the felled tree stump, which he displays, grew in the Lambs' garden. That the Lambs lived at Little Queen Street as early as 1794, two years before the earliest of Charles Lamb's letters, I know on the evidence of Mr. Carey Foster, who tells me that his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Weight, who had been married in 1788, occupied rooms in Little Queen Street, in the same house as the Lambs, some time before settling in Manchester in 1794. The tradition in the family is that the Lambs shared the house with the Weights, but the reverse may be the case. The only personal recollection that has come down is of Miss Lamb, "who was a dressmaker," remarking one day that she should like to be permitted to "improve Mrs. Weight's caps."

To come back to Lamb, whom we left on February 8th, 1792, laying down his pen in the Examiner's office at the South-Sea House for the last time and returning home with his earnings. Whether or not he had heard of the opening for him at the East India House, I cannot say; but he did not enter that Company's employ until April 5th, three months later. To this we come shortly. At the present moment there is a more romantic topic for consideration, for my impression is that Lamb filled part at least of the interval by visiting his grandmother, and at the same time began to cherish affection for the girl whom he afterwards called Alice W——, but who is thought to have been Ann Simmons of Blenheims, near Blakesware. My reasons for believing this to be the case are, (1) that on April 5th, 1792,

he passed into harness from which he never escaped, except for annual holidays—at first, probably, very brief ones—or single days when he could not have reached Widford; and (2) that Mrs. Field died in August, 1792, thus closing Blakesware to her grandchildren. We have no knowledge of any other friends with whom Lamb could have stayed after her death, while it is hardly likely that so young a clerk could have afforded to stay at Mr. Clemitson's inn at Widford, except very occasionally.

The full story of Lamb's young passion belongs to a later chapter, but the early months of 1792 I believe to be the time of its birth. Lamb was seventeen in that year, two days after he left the South-Sea House.

It has been stated that Lamb owed his nomination to the East India House to Samuel Salt, but Miss Manning records that Joseph Paice was again the benefactor, with the co-operation of Sir Francis Baring, then Chairman of the East India Company. This may well be the case, particularly as Samuel Salt had died two months before Lamb took up his new appointment; which he did on April 5th, 1792, passing at once into the Accountant's department, where he was destined to remain for three and thirty years. Every member of this department had to enter into a bond of £500, and to find two friends willing to do the same, as a security of good behaviour. Lamb's bondsmen were Peter Peirson, Esquire, one of his Old Benchers of the Inner Temple and a friend of Samuel Salt, and John Lamb of the Inner Temple, Gentleman, this being John Lamb the younger. It may be added here that when Peter Peirson died his place was taken by James White (of the *Falstaff Letters*, to whom we shall presently come); when White died his place was taken by Martin Charles Burney; and when John Lamb died his place was taken by John Stoddart. Not until a clerk had served his three probationary years was any salary given to him. Lamb, therefore, was not in the receipt of money until April, 1795, when he began to earn £40 a year. The next year it rose to £70.

The age of John Lamb the elder I have not discovered, but he cannot at this time have been far from seventy; and there are suggestions that his health began to break almost at once after Samuel Salt's death. We have no information of the history of

THE INDIA HOUSE, LEADENHALL STREET, IN LAMB'S DAY

FROM *ACKERMANN'S REPOSITORY OF ARTS*

the family for at least three years: the latter half of 1792, all 1793 and the greater part of 1794 are a blank. Two glimpses of Charles Lamb we have, however, in this period, Leigh Hunt providing one and Valentine Le Grice the other. Leigh Hunt, who was destined to know Lamb well, first saw him on a visit to his old school, probably some time in 1792-94, when Hunt was a small Christ's Hospitaller. He writes in his *Autobiography:* "Lamb I recollect coming to see the boys, with a pensive, brown, handsome, and kindly face, and a gait advancing with a motion from side to side, between involuntary consciousness and attempted ease. His brown complexion may have been owing to a visit to the country; his air of uneasiness to a great burden of sorrow. He dressed with a quaker-like plainness. I did not know him as Lamb; I took him for a Mr. 'Guy,' having heard somebody address him by that appellation, I suppose in jest."

The origin of the Guy joke is explained by Valentine Le Grice in his communication to Talfourd from which I have already quoted: "In the first year of his clerkship Lamb spent the evening of the 5th November with some of his former schoolfellows, who, being amused with the particularly large and flapping brim of his round hat, pinned it up on the sides in the form of a cocked-hat. Lamb made no alteration in it, but walked home in his usual sauntering gait towards the Temple. As he was going down Ludgate-hill, some gay young men, who seemed not to have passed the London Tavern without resting, exclaimed, 'The veritable Guy!—no man of straw!' and with this exclamation they took him up, making a chair with their arms, carried him, seated him on a post in St. Paul's-churchyard, and there left him. This story Lamb told so seriously, that the truth of it was never doubted. He wore his three-cornered hat many evenings, and retained the name of Guy ever after. Like Nym, he quietly sympathised in the fun, and seemed to say, 'that was the humour of it.'

"A clergyman of the City lately wrote to me, 'I have no recollection of Lamb. There was a gentleman called Guy, to whom you once introduced me, and with whom I have occasionally interchanged nods for more than thirty years; but how is it that I never met Mr. Lamb? If I was ever introduced to him, I wonder that we never came in contact during my residence for

ten years in Edmonton.' Imagine this gentleman's surprise when I informed him that his nods to Mr. Guy had been constantly reciprocated by Mr. Lamb!"

In his essay "On Some of the Old Actors," written in 1822 or at the end of 1821, Lamb refers to a playbill of "Twelfth Night" at Drury Lane "two and thirty years ago." Here we have another example of his extraordinary gift of observation and receptivity, for in that year, which would be 1789 or early 1790, he was not quite fifteen, and yet upon his memories of these and other contemporary performances he based his wonderful criticisms—more, reconstructions—of the great actors of that time, and notably of Bensley as Malvolio. I imagine that he became a confirmed playgoer almost from the moment that he left Christ's Hospital. The essays tell us who were his favourite performers—Mrs. Jordan, Munden, Liston (afterwards to be among his evening visitors), Elliston, Mrs. Powel (afterwards Mrs. Renard), Bensley, Dodd, Dicky Suett, the Palmers, Jack Bannister, Miss Farren, Miss Pope, William Parsons, Lovegrove and John Philip Kemble. These were before the days of Miss Kelly, his later divinity.

In the essay "Barbara S——," attributing—but not, I think, seriously—another frustration of destiny to his stammering tongue, Lamb even suggests that he wanted to be an actor himself. "I was always fond of the society of players, and am not sure that an impediment in my speech (which certainly kept me out of the pulpit) even more than certain personal disqualifications, which are often got over in that profession, did not prevent me at one time of life from adopting it."

## CHAPTER VII

### LOVE

### 1794-1796

Coleridge in London—The Salutation in Newgate Street—Ann Simmons—The Sonnets—Mary Sumner—Charles Lamb, Bachelor—Robert Southey—*Falstaff's Letters*—Jem White.

THE latter part of 1792, all 1793 and the greater part of 1794 are, as I have said, a blank. But in late December, 1794, we see Charles Lamb, now nearly twenty, in what was destined to become a characteristic environment, at the Salutation Tavern, at 17 Newgate Street (almost opposite Christ's Hospital, and now, like that building, destroyed), drinking egg hot, smoking Oronooko, and listening to Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Coleridge, aged twenty-two, in love with Mary Evans, and engaged to Sarah Fricker, having just gone down from Cambridge in term time and abandoned his degree, was now at the Salutation, postponing, as became usual with him, his duty. His duty was to hasten to Bristol and put his relations with Sarah Fricker on a right footing. Instead he was writing sonnets to eminent characters in the *Morning Chronicle*, with Lamb's help in one at least—that addressed to Mrs. Siddons—and settling the affairs of the universe with an eloquence that had forced a previous landlord to the extreme length of offering him free board and lodging if only he would talk and talk. With him, after office hours and far into the night, we find Lamb.

From some lines to Lamb which, in December, 1794, Coleridge sent him with an unfinished poem ("Religious Musings"), we know Mary Lamb to have been recently ill:—

> In fancy (well I know)
> From business wandering far and local cares,
> Thou creepest round a dear-loved Sister's bed
> With noiseless step, and watchest the faint look,
> Soothing each pang with fond solicitude,
> And tenderest tones medicinal of love. . . .

Cheerily, dear Charles!
Thou thy best friend shalt cherish many a year:
Such warm presagings feel I of high Hope.
For not uninterested the dear Maid
I've viewed—her soul affectionate yet wise,
Her polish'd wit as mild as lambent glories
That play around a sainted infant's head.

But we may take it practically as certain that Mary Lamb had recovered before the midnight vigils of the Salutation season set in.

Many years later—in 1818—when dedicating to Coleridge the first volume of his *Works*, Lamb wrote of these old nights and what they meant to him: "Some of the Sonnets, which shall be carelessly turned over by the general reader, may happily awaken in you remembrances, which I should be sorry should be ever totally extinct—the memory

'Of summer days and of delightful years—'

even so far back as to those old suppers at our old ********** Inn,—when life was fresh, and topics exhaustless,—and you first kindled in me, if not the power, yet the love of poetry, and beauty, and kindliness.—

'What words have I heard
Spoke at the Mermaid!''

Writing to Coleridge in the summer of 1796, eighteen months after the Salutation conferences, Lamb tells us something of his state of mind at the end of 1794. He says: "You came to Town, and I saw you at a time when your heart was yet bleeding with recent wounds. Like yourself, I was sore galled with disappointed Hope. . . . When you left London [in January, 1795, dragged away to Bristol by Southey], I felt a dismal void in my heart, I found myself cut off at one and the same time from two most dear to me."

This brings us again to "Alice W——," for the second person indicated was certainly not Southey, but—there is, I think, small room for doubt—Lamb's Hertfordshire beauty, Ann Simmons, Anna of the sonnets and Alice of the essays; and Lamb's reference shows us that the beginning of 1795 marked the final close of their intimacy. Lamb was then nearly twenty. My own feeling, as I have said, is that it was early 1792—Mrs. Field having died in the summer of that year—that saw Lamb's most serious wooing. Of 1793 we know nothing; and of 1794 only

that at the end of it Lamb carried to Coleridge tales of "disappointed hope," and that he parted for ever from Anna at the same time as from Coleridge.

That now, in 1796, he still loved her, or loved to dwell tenderly and wistfully upon all that she stood for in his mind, we may believe, remembering that he was only twenty-one, that he was solitary, that he was proposing to be a poet, and that his hero Coleridge had long cherished a grand passion; but I do not fancy that his original boyish fervour ever revived.

Mrs. Field is said to have discouraged the intimacy on the grounds that there was insanity in the Lamb family, of the truth of which statement subsequent years afforded only too much proof. Indeed Lamb himself came to her support, for in his letter to Coleridge of May 27th, 1796, the earliest that has been preserved, he tells him that "the six weeks that finished last year [1795] and began this your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a mad house at Hoxton. . . . Coleridge, it may convince you of my regards for you when I tell you my head ran on you in my madness, as much almost as on another Person, who I am inclined to think was the more immediate cause of my temporary frenzy."[1] By "another person" it is reasonable to suppose that Anna is again meant. The same letter offers further evidence in support of my belief that the more passionate intercourse between Lamb and Anna had long ceased. Lamb writes: "My Sonnets I have extended to the number of nine since I saw you" (in January, 1795). Some of these sonnets may have perished, but of those that remain Anna is the subject; and among them is this, which we know was written prior to early summer 1795, and which belongs to Widford:—

> Was it some sweet device of Faery
> That mocked my steps with many a lonely glade,
> And fancied wanderings with a fair-hair'd maid?
> Have these things been? or what rare witchery,
> Impregning with delights the charmed air,
> Enlighted up the semblance of a smile
> In those fine eyes? methought they spake the while
> Soft soothing things, which might enforce despair
> To drop the murdering knife, and let go by

[1] One other thing that (on the evidence of Southey) we know of Lamb's temporary frenzy is that he believed himself for a while to be young Norval in Home's "Douglas."

His foul resolve. And does the lonely glade
Still court the foot-steps of the fair-hair'd maid?
Still in her locks the gales of summer sigh?
While I forlorn do wander reckless where,
And 'mid my wanderings meet no Anna there.

Writing to Coleridge a little later, Lamb copies out other sonnets. Of the following, he says it was written "early in last summer" (1795) in Hertfordshire, "on revisiting a spot where the scene was laid of my first sonnet [that just quoted] that 'mock'd my steps with many a lonely glade'":—

When last I roved these winding wood walks green,
Green winding walks, and pathways shady-sweet,
Ofttimes would Anna seek the silent scene,
Shrouding her beauties in the lone retreat.
No more I hear her footsteps in the shade;
Her image only in these pleasant ways
Meets me self-wandring where in better days
I held free converse with my fair haird maid.
I pass'd the little cottage, which she loved,
The cottage which did once my all contain:
It spake of days that ne'er must come again,
Spake to my heart and much my heart was moved.
"Now fair befall thee, gentle maid," said I,
And from the cottage turn'd me, with a sigh.

The same letter contains also the following sonnet, belonging, we may assume, to the same period:—

A timid grace sits trembling in her Eye,
As loth to meet the rudeness of men's sight,
Yet shedding a delicious lunar light,
That steeps in kind oblivious ex'tacy
The care-craz'd mind, like some still melody:
Speaking most plain the thoughts which do possess
Her gentle sprite, peace and meek quietness,
And innocent loves, and maiden purity.
A look whereof might heal the cruel smart
Of changed friends, or fortune's wrongs unkind;
Might to sweet deeds of mercy move the heart
Of him, who hates his brethren of mankind.
Turned are those beams from me, who fondly yet
Past joys, vain loves, and buried hopes regret.

Now all these sonnets, written, two of them, in early summer 1795, and one, the first, some time before that, speak retrospectively of love. The pleasant days were over, and had been over for some time.

It is not possible to describe Alice W——. Both in the sonnets, and again, a quarter of a century later, in the essay on Blakesware, Lamb tells us that she had fair hair; nothing else. "That Beauty with the cool blue pastoral drapery, and a lamb—that hung next the great bay window—with the bright yellow H——shire hair, and eye of watchet hue—so like my Alice!" I have tried to find this picture, but in vain. It probably was sold by auction at the Gilston sale, together with the other ancient treasures of Blakesware as Lamb knew them. Among the odd canvases at the old Rye House the eye rests upon no Beauty with cool blue pastoral drapery and a lamb. Pictures, however, are seldom destroyed, and time may yet bring to light, possibly in some Hertfordshire farm parlour, the picture that reminded Lamb of Alice W——. In connection with Anna's fair hair it is interesting to note that the only other maiden who seems ever to have attracted Lamb's youthful eye was dark as a gipsy, as a glance at the portrait of Hester Savory, opposite page 238, will show.

Lamb says, in "Dream Children," that the children of his Alice (Ann Simmons) "call Bartrum father." Ann Simmons of Blenheims is known to have married a pawnbroker named Bartram in Princes Street, Leicester Square; and Lamb in later life is known, now and again, to have loitered on the pavement hoping to catch a glimpse of her face. Mrs. Jane Tween, of Widford, the daughter of Randal Norris, in a letter to Canon Ainger, says: "The last time I went to see Mrs. Bartram 'the fair haired maiden' so frequently alluded to and ever cherished in affectionate remembrance . . . she was then a widow residing in Fitzroy Street Fitzroy Square with her three daughters before Maria her second daughter was married to Dr. Coulson."[1]

I have I think made it clear that Lamb's romance was a closed chapter when he was still only nineteen or even eighteen, while its memory, as we shall see, had faded from his mind before he was twenty-two.[2] Although, it is true, Lamb was older for his years than most boys, his youth may serve as one reason why we should not expend too much sympathy upon his disappoint-

[1] According to Mr. Samuel Davey, who recently lectured on the subject, Lamb's first love was Mary Sumner, of Bishop's Stortford. She married a Captain Wilson and died in 1857.

[2] See page 106.

ment. Indeed if we reflect for a moment upon what was to happen, we are at once aware that had he and Ann ever been betrothed little but sorrow could have come of it; for the tragedy of September, 1796, would either have cruelly broken the engagement, or Lamb, by marrying, would probably have been unable to give his sister a home and thus would have lost for ever a companionship without which he would not have been the Charles Lamb that we know and reverence and love.

My own feeling is that such a sister as was Mary Lamb in her healthy state was a more congenial companion for Charles Lamb—to whom so many of the characteristics of the bachelor seem to have belonged from the first—than any wife would have been.

To return to Lamb's friends at this period, we find from a letter of Southey to Moxon in 1836 that Coleridge brought Lamb and himself together for the first time "in the winter of 1794-95." It was in January, 1795. Southey was twenty on August 12th, 1794, and was thus by six months Lamb's senior. He had left Balliol, had written *Joan of Arc* (in its first draft), had become engaged to Edith Fricker, and was busy in literary projects with both Coleridge and Robert Lovell. He had also, with Coleridge, just completed the scheme of Pantisocracy, which it is probable, or at any rate possible, Lamb was asked to join—unless a twinkle in his eye forewarned the two idealists. It was in order to lead Coleridge back to Sarah Fricker that Southey had come to London; and as events proved, he had better have remained at home. Lamb and he, whose friendship never reached the first order of intimacy, did not meet again until 1797.

In the same letter to Moxon Southey tells us a little more about John Lamb and his family in the winter of 1794-95. "When I saw the family (one evening only . . .), they were lodging somewhere near Lincoln's Inn, on the western side (I forget the street), and were evidently in uncomfortable circumstances. The father and mother were both living; and I have some dim recollection of the latter's invalid appearance. The father's senses had failed him before that time. He published some poems in quarto. Lamb showed me once an imperfect copy: 'The Sparrow's Wedding' was the title of the longest piece, and this was the author's favourite; he liked, in his dotage, to hear Charles read it."

"His most familiar friend," Southey continues, "when I first saw him, was White, who held some office at Christ's Hospital, and continued intimate with him as long as he lived." This brings us to Lamb's first association with authorship; and shows us too that his melancholy cannot have been constant. James White was a schoolfellow almost exactly Lamb's own age, who after leaving Christ's Hospital had entered the treasurer's office there. Together, in White's room at night, they were engaged on a comic gloss upon Shakespeare in the shape of a volume of letters supposed to have been written by Sir John Falstaff. The book, *Original Letters, etc., of Sir John Falstaff and His Friends*, was published in the summer of 1796. White's name alone is given to it, but that Lamb had a share is beyond question: he could not have sat by inactive during the progress of a joke so near his heart. Indeed Southey's testimony is that Lamb and White were joint authors, in which case the little volume contains the earliest specimens of Lamb's prose that we possess. My own impression is that the Dedication is wholly Lamb's.

Another schoolfellow of both Lamb and White, John Mathew Gutch, whom we shall meet later, wrote as follows of *Falstaff's Letters*: "These letters were the production of my old schoolfellow, James White, with incidental hints and corrections by another schoolfellow, Charles Lamb. Amongst his friends, White was familiarly called 'Sir John.' I was present with him at a masquerade, when he personated Sir John Falstaff, in a dress borrowed from the wardrobe of Covent Garden Theatre, through the kindness of Fawcett, the comedian. His imitation of the character, or I should say personation, excited great mirth and applause, as well as considerable jealousy from some of the company present, supposed to be hired actors for the occasion; who, with much ill-will, procured a rope and held it across the room (at the Pantheon in Oxford Street), and White was obliged to take a leap over the rope to escape being thrown down. The exertion he underwent by this interruption, added to the weight of the dress, injured his health for some days afterward.

"We were at this time in the habit of meeting at the 'Feathers' in Hand Court, Holborn, to drink nips of Burton ale, as they were called. . . . White was a remarkably open-hearted, joyous

companion ; very intimate with the Lamb family, who were then lodging in [Little] Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

White's book is now forgotten, and is not likely ever to be read except by the curious few, despite Lamb's belief in its merits (a partiality which I think was not unassociated with paternal sentiment) ; but James White himself is immortal by reason of his presence in the essay on Chimney-Sweepers. He "burnishes" there for all time. "My pleasant friend Jem White . . . instituted an annual feast of chimney-sweepers, at which it was his pleasure to officiate as host and waiter. It was a solemn supper held in Smithfield, upon the yearly return of the fair of St. Bartholomew. Cards were issued a week before to the master-sweeps in and about the metropolis, confining the invitation to their younger fry. Now and then an elderly stripling would get in among us, and be good-naturedly winked at ; but our main body were infantry. One unfortunate wight, indeed, who, relying upon his dusky suit, had intruded himself into our party, but by tokens was providentially discovered in time to be no chimney-sweeper (all is not soot which looks so), was quoited out of the presence with universal indignation, as not having on the wedding garment ; but in general the greatest harmony prevailed. . . .

"The guests assembled about seven. In those little temporary parlours three tables were spread with napery, not so fine as substantial, and at every board a comely hostess presided with her pan of hissing sausages. The nostrils of the young rogues dilated at the savour. James White, as head waiter, had charge of the first table ; and myself, with our trusty companion Bigod [John Fenwick], ordinarily ministered to the other two. There was clambering and jostling, you may be sure, who should get at the first table—for Rochester in his maddest days could not have done the humours of the scene with more spirit than my friend. After some general expression of thanks for the honour the company had done him, his inaugural ceremony was to clasp the greasy waist of old dame Ursula (the fattest of the three), that stood frying and fretting, half-blessing, half-cursing 'the gentleman,' and imprint upon her chaste lips a tender salute, whereat the universal host would set up a shout that tore the concave, while hundreds of grinning teeth startled the night with their brightness.

"O it was a pleasure to see the sable younkers lick in the

unctuous meat, with *his* more unctuous sayings—how he would fit the tit bits to the puny mouths, reserving the lengthier links for the seniors—how he would intercept a morsel even in the jaws of some young desperado, declaring it 'must to the pan again to be browned, for it was not fit for a gentleman's eating' —how he would recommend this slice of white bread, or that piece of kissing-crust, to a tender juvenile, advising them all to have a care of cracking their teeth, which were their best patrimony,—how genteelly he would deal about the small ale, as if it were wine, naming the brewer, and protesting, if it were not good, he should lose their custom; with a special recommendation to wipe the lip before drinking.

"Then we had our toasts—'The King,'—the 'Cloth,'—which, whether they understood or not, was equally diverting and flattering;—and for a crowning sentiment, which never failed, 'May the Brush supersede the Laurel!' All these, and fifty other fancies, which were rather felt than comprehended by his guests, would he utter, standing upon tables, and prefacing every sentiment with a 'Gentlemen, give me leave to propose so and so,' which was a prodigious comfort to those young orphans; every now and then stuffing into his mouth (for it did not do to be squeamish on these occasions) indiscriminate pieces of those reeking sausages, which pleased them mightily, and was the savouriest part, you may believe, of the entertainment.

> Golden lads and lasses must,
> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust—

"James White is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased. He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died [in 1820]—of my world at least. His old clients look for him among the pens; and, missing him, reproach the altered feast of St. Bartholomew, and the glory of Smithfield departed for ever."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BEGINNING OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

### 1796

Coleridge at Bristol—John Lamb's Accident—Priestley—William Wordsworth.

WE come now to the date of the first letter in Lamb's correspondence that has been preserved—May 27th, 1796. That Coleridge, to whom it was addressed, should have taken such care of so many of the priceless series of letters that he received from Lamb at this period is one of the mysteries. If only he had kept all, our debt would be beyond appraisement.

Coleridge, at this time, was in his twenty-fourth year. He had married Sarah Fricker in the previous October, and was now living at Bristol, meditating upon a thousand projects, talking much and occasionally lecturing and preaching. His faith in Pantisocracy was weakening, although he would not admit as much, and he was intensely displeased with Southey for giving it up completely. His magazine *The Watchman* had just ceased its brief life, to Lamb's expressed satisfaction; while his *Poems on Various Subjects*, with four sonnets by Lamb, and Southey's *Joan of Arc*, with Coleridge's "Vision" in it, were both on the eve of publication by Joseph Cottle of Bristol, to whose *Recollections* we must go for much of our information respecting this period.

The first letter that has been preserved, but not by any means the first of the series, shows us that Lamb had been employed as a medium between the philosopher and the landlord of the Salutation; for Lamb writes: "Make yourself perfectly easy about May. I paid his bill, when I sent your clothes. I was flush of money, and am so still to all the purposes of a single life, so give yourself no further concern about it. The money would be superfluous to me, if I had it." Lamb was never ex-

travagant; more, he was even considered by superficial observers to be miserly; but he always had money for his friends, from first to last, and it is, I think, a happy circumstance that this, the first paragraph of his first preserved letter, should illustrate his generosity.[1]

The principal news contained in this missive we have already read, on page 81. Incidentally, Lamb mentions that Valentine Le Grice has gone to Cornwall, and he encloses a sonnet addressed to Mary Lamb, of which he says: "The sonnet I send you has small merit as poetry but you will be curious to read it when I tell you it was written in my prison-house [the Hoxton Asylum] in one of my lucid Intervals.

"TO MY SISTER

"If from my lips some angry accents fell,
Peevish complaint, or harsh reproof unkind,
'Twas but the error of a sickly mind,
And troubled thoughts, clouding the purer well,
And waters clear, of Reason; and for me,
Let this my verse the poor atonement be,
My verse, which thou to praise wast ever inclined
Too highly, and with a partial eye to see
No blemish: thou to me didst ever shew
Fondest affection, and woud'st oftimes lend
An ear to the desponding love sick lay,
Weeping my sorrows with me, who repay
But ill the mighty debt of love I owe,
Mary, to thee, my sister and my friend."

The second letter—probably June 1st—contains several of the love sonnets, three of which I have quoted in the preceding chapter, Lamb having been asked by Coleridge to contribute seriously to the second edition of Coleridge's *Poems*, already in contemplation. Lamb assures Coleridge that there are "10,000 objections" against his paying him a visit at Bristol and thus acquaints him with a domestic trouble: "We have just learned that my poor brother has had a sad accident, a large stone blown down by yesterday's high wind has bruised his leg in a most shocking manner; he is under the care of Cruikshanks." At the end of the letter Lamb writes: "Coleridge, in

[1] His sister says, in a letter to Sarah Stoddart in 1804, "My brother, who never makes up his mind whether he will be a Miser or a Spendthrift, is at all times a strange mixture of both."

reading your *R[eligious] Musings* I felt a transient superiority over you, I *have* seen Priestley. I love to see his name repeated in your writings. I love and honor him almost profanely. You would be charmed with his *sermons*, if you never read 'em.—You have doubtless read his books, illustrative of the doctrine of Necessity. Prefixed to a late work of his, in answer to Paine, there is a preface, giving an account of the Man and his services to Men, written by Lindsey, his dearest friend,—well worth your reading." This passage shows us that Lamb's mind was not wholly bounded by the drollery of James White and the fond regrets attaching to the memory of Anna. Later in life, as we shall see, his religion, ceasing to be articulate, was merged in conduct, but in his twenty-first year his interest in Priestley and his Unitarian and fatalistic creed was intense. To the end, I think, although this point is a little vague, Lamb remained nominally a Unitarian, a profession of faith to which probably he was first led by his Aunt Hetty (a constant attender at the Essex Street chapel) and in which he was fortified by Coleridge. Coleridge, however, not long after abandoned the gospel of Necessity absolutely.

One other passage in the letter of June 1st is noteworthy as containing the first mention of Wordsworth's name. "I shall be too ill," Lamb says, "to call on Wordsworth myself but will take care to transmit him his poem, when I have read it." Wordsworth, who was destined later to be among Lamb's most honoured friends, was now a young man of twenty-six. After travelling in France in 1791-92, where his Revolutionary doctrines were strengthened, he published the "Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches," in 1793, and found for the latter poem one sympathetic reader at least, in Coleridge, then at Cambridge. After much unsettlement of mind, in which he was endeavouring to decide upon a career and to reconcile the course of events in France with his gospel of liberty, Wordsworth became possessed of a legacy of £900, which, added to his own and his sister Dorothy's capital, and his salary for instructing the son of Basil Montagu, made it possible for him to take, with his sister, a farmhouse at Racedown, between Lyme Regis and Crewkerne, and devote his time largely to gratifying his poetical ambition. That was in 1795, the year in which he first met Coleridge.

During the Racedown period Wordsworth wrote some satires

in the manner of Juvenal, "Guilt and Sorrow," and his play "The Borderers." The poem to which Lamb refers was probably "Guilt and Sorrow," and we must suppose that Wordsworth either was staying in London or was proposing to visit it. There is no evidence, however, that Lamb met him before July of the following year, 1797, at Nether Stowey.

The next letter—June 10th—consists chiefly of criticism of Southey's *Joan of Arc* (with Coleridge's "Vision") and of Coleridge's *Poems*. Three of Lamb's four sonnets had been subjected to a process of improvement by Coleridge, and Lamb protests: "I love my sonnets because they are the reflected images of my own feelings at different times. . . . I charge you, Col., spare my ewe lambs." The principal news is that William Evans, brother of Coleridge's Mary Evans, had just come into the East India House. Evans seems never to have been more than an acquaintance; but his contribution to our knowledge of him is important, since it was Evans who, twenty years later, introduced Talfourd to the circle.

In the next letter—June 13th—Lamb sends "The Grandame" (which is part of a long blank verse poem that either was never completed or was, in the remainder, destroyed) and expresses his intention of publishing it, with his other verses, through Biggs, Coleridge's printer. This project, however, came to nothing. Lamb also copies out some beauties from Massinger and Beaumont and Fletcher (in whom, even at this early date, he has discovered "a greater richness of poetical fancy than in any one, Shakespeare excepted"). Later we have a passage in a more familiar manner: "I have been drinking egg-hot and smoking Orinooko (associated circumstances, which ever forcibly recall to my mind our evenings and nights at the Salutation). . . . Coleridge, you know not my supreme happiness at having one on earth (though counties separate us) whom I can call a friend. Remember you those tender lines of Logan?—

> 'Our broken friendships we deplore,
> And loves of youth that are no more;
> No after friendships e'er can raise
> Th' endearments of our early days,
> And ne'er the heart such fondness prove,
> As when we first began to love.'

"I am writing at random, and half-tipsy, what you may not

*equally* understand, as you will be sober when you read it; but *my* sober and *my* half-tipsy hours you are alike a sharer in. Good night.

> 'Then up rose our bard, like a prophet in drink,
> Craigdoroch, thou'lt soar when creation shall sink.'"

In the same letter Lamb is hopeful of being able to visit Bristol in a few weeks' time. On July 1st he is still hopeful, but less confident, and the uncertainty leads to the first passage of anything like Elian fancy in the correspondence: "Hope is a charming, lively, blue-eyed wench, and I am always glad of her company, but could dispense with the visitor she brings with her, her younger sister, Fear, a white-liver'd, lilly-cheeked, bashful, palpitating, awkward hussey, that hangs like a green girl at her sister's apronstrings, and will go with her whithersoever *she* goes." George Dyer, to whom we shall come later, is mentioned for the first time in this letter; and at the end is the statement that Richardson, head of the Accountant's Department at the East India House, has refused to allow Lamb to take the Bristol holiday, on the ground of the illness of other clerks. There is also the statement that Mrs. Lamb has entirely lost the use of her limbs—a condition which seems to have kept her daughter in constant attendance, by night as well as day. Here perhaps—added to the father's senile dependence—we may see part of the cause of Mary Lamb's subsequent breakdown.

On July 5th Lamb sends some verses addressed "To Sara and S. T. C." lamenting his inability to visit them; and later in the day he writes again, to modify the poem, and adds some lines to Cowper, on his recovery from one of his fits of mania, "the sorest malady of all." Lamb adds in prose that a recovery from "lunacies" begets "pity, and pity love, and love, admiration." He also expresses pleasure to hear of Coleridge's project of coming to town to be joint editor of the *Chronicle*, a scheme which did not, however, bear fruit, and he tells him that *Falstaff's Letters* are being published and that Dyer has already reviewed them in the *Critical Review*. With this letter the correspondence, in so far as it has been preserved, ceases until the end of September, when it reopens under the most tragic of circumstances.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRAGEDY

### 1796 (*continued*)

ON the morning of Wednesday, September 21st, 1796, the Lamb family, although not in a prosperous condition, may yet have considered itself not unfortunate. Charles Lamb was in his twenty-second year, in tolerable health, and fairly happy among his friends and books, his correspondence and his tender regrets. His father, though, according to Southey, in his dotage, was probably occasionally still visited by his old humour and sprightliness; Mrs. Lamb, although ill, may have been for the most part a serene invalid; Aunt Hetty was probably kept busy with house work; Mary Lamb, now a woman of thirty-two, was actively engaged as a mantua-maker, assisted by a little apprentice, helping and learning; and John Lamb (now recovering from his accident) was in a good position at the South-Sea House. Except that Mary had been somewhat overwrought and peculiar of late, the outlook was clear.

Suddenly and completely everything was changed. On the evening of Wednesday, September 21st, Mary Lamb, for the second time in her life, developed symptoms of mania which made it necessary for the doctor to be consulted, and early the next morning Charles Lamb called on Dr. Pitcairn, but failed to find him. Later in the day for a few dreadful moments his sister's reason utterly left her, and in a paroxysm of rage she stabbed her mother to the heart. Lamb's letter to Coleridge on September 27th, 1796, tells the story:—

"MY DEAREST FRIEND—White or some of my friends or the public papers by this time may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines. My poor dear dearest sister in a fit of insanity

has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a mad house, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses,—I eat and drink and sleep, and have my judgment I believe very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr. Norris of the Bluecoat school has been very very kind to us, and we have no other friend, but thank God I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write,—as religious a letter as possible—but no mention of what is gone and done with.—With me 'the former things are passed away,' and I have something more to do that [than] to feel——

"God almighty have us all in his keeping.——

"C. Lamb.

"Mention nothing of poetry. I have destroyed every vestige of past vanities of that kind. Do as you please, but if you publish, publish mine (I give free leave) without name or initial, and never send me a book, I charge you.

"You [your] own judgment will convince you not to take any notice of this yet to your dear wife.—You look after your family,—I have my reason and strength left to take care of mine. I charge you, don't think of coming to see me. Write. I will not see you if you come. God almighty love you and all of us——"[1]

[1] Lamb's letter indicates that he was present at the tragic moment or immediately afterwards; but the report of the inquest in the *Morning Chronicle* for September 26th, 1796, makes no reference to him:—

"On Friday afternoon the Coroner and a respectable Jury sat on the body of a Lady in the neighbourhood of Holborn, who died in consequence of a wound from her daughter the preceding day. It appeared by the evidence adduced, that while the family were preparing for dinner, the young lady seized a case knife laying on the table, and in a menacing manner pursued a little girl, her apprentice, round the room; on the eager calls of her helpless infirm mother to forbear, she renounced her first object, and with loud shrieks approached her parent.

"The child by her cries quickly brought up the landlord of the house, but too late—the dreadful scene presented to him the mother lifeless, pierced to the heart, on a chair, her daughter yet wildly standing over her with the fatal knife, and the venerable old man, her father, weeping by her side, himself bleeding at the forehead from the effects of a severe blow he received from one of the forks she had been madly hurling about the room.

"For a few days prior to this the family had observed some symptoms of insanity in her, which had so much increased on the Wednesday evening, that her brother early the next morning went in quest of Dr. Pitcairn—had that gentleman been met with, the fatal catastrophe had, in all probability, been prevented.

"It seems the young Lady had been once before, in her earlier years, deranged,

Lamb's fears that his sister might have to be removed to a hospital, by which I suppose him to mean Bedlam, or some other public asylum from which there was no escape, fortunately were groundless. Documentary evidence seems no longer to exist, but we know that Mary Lamb was permitted to remain under restraint in a private house until her brother was able, in the spring of 1797, to find a home for her. Her removal was then allowed by the authorities on his giving (I quote Talfourd's words) "his solemn engagement that he would take her under his care for life." Charles Lamb when he made this promise was just twenty-two. It was not, however, until his father's death early in 1799 that Mary Lamb joined her brother under one roof.

Coleridge's reply to Lamb's letter, which Lamb called "an inestimable treasure," is preserved. It ends thus: "As to what regards yourself, I approve altogether of your abandoning what you justly call vanities. I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God; we cannot arrive at any portion of heavenly bliss without in some measure imitating Christ. And they arrive at the largest inheritance who imitate the most difficult parts of his character, and bowed down and crushed under foot, cry in fulness of faith, 'Father, thy will be done.'

"I wish above measure to have you for a little while here—no visitants shall blow on the nakedness of your feelings—you shall be quiet, and your spirit may be healed. I see no possible objection, unless your father's helplessness prevent you, and unless you are necessary to him. If this be not the case, I charge you write me that you will come.

"I charge you, my dearest friend, not to dare to encourage gloom or despair—you are a temporary sharer in human miseries that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine nature. I charge you, if by any means it be possible, come to me."

On October 3rd Lamb wrote to Coleridge again. I quote a

from the harassing fatigues of too much business.—As her carriage towards her mother was ever affectionate in the extreme, it is believed that to the increased attentiveness, which her parents' infirmities called for by day and night, is to be attributed the present insanity of this ill-fated young woman.

"It has been stated in some of the Morning Papers, that she has an insane brother also in confinement—this is without foundation.

"The Jury of course brought in their Verdict, *Lunacy*."

large part of the letter: "It will be a comfort to you, I know, to know that our prospects are somewhat brighter. My poor dear dearest sister, the unhappy and unconscious instrument of the Almighty's judgments to our house, is restored to her senses; to a dreadful sense and recollection of what has past, awful to her mind, and impressive (as it must be to the end of life) but temper'd with religious resignation, and the reasonings of a sound judgment, which in this early stage knows how to distinguish between a deed committed in a transient fit of frenzy, and the terrible guilt of a Mother's murther. I have seen her. I found her this morning calm and serene, far very very far from an indecent forgetful serenity; she has a most affectionate and tender concern for what has happend. Indeed from the beginning, frightful and hopeless as her disorder seemed, I had confidence enough in her strength of mind, and religious principle, to look forward to a time when *even she* might recover tranquillity.

"God be praised, Coleridge, wonderful as it is to tell, I have never once been otherwise than collected, and calm; even on the dreadful day and in the midst of the terrible scene I preserved a tranquillity, which bystanders may have construed into indifference, a tranquillity not of despair; is it folly or sin in me to say that it was a religious principle that *most* supported me? I allow much to other favorable circumstances. I felt that I had something else to do than to regret; on that first evening my Aunt was lying insensible, to all appearance like one dying,—my father, with his poor forehead plaisterd over from a wound he had received from a daughter dearly loved by him, and who loved him no less dearly,—my mother a dead and murder'd corpse in the next room —yet was I wonderfully supported. I closed not my eyes in sleep that night, but lay without terrors and without despair. I have lost no sleep since. I had been long used not to rest in things of sense, had endeavord after a comprehension of mind, unsatisfied with the 'ignorant present time,' and this kept me up. I had the whole weight of the family thrown on me, for my brother, little disposed (I speak not without tenderness for him) at any time to take care of old age and infirmities, had now, with his bad leg, an exemption from such duties, and I was now left alone.

"One little incident may serve to make you understand my way of managing my mind. Within a day or 2 after the fatal ONE, we drest for dinner a tongue, which we had had salted for some

weeks in the house. As I sat down a feeling like remorse struck me,—this tongue poor Mary got for me, and can I partake of it now, when she is far away—a thought occurrd and relieved me,—if I give in to this way of feeling, there is not a chair, a room, an object in our rooms, that will not awaken the keenest griefs, I must rise above such weaknesses.—I hope this was not want of true feeling. I did not let this carry me, tho', too far.

"On the very 2d day (I date from the day of horrors) as is usual in such cases there were a matter of 20 people I do think supping in our room. They prevailed on me to eat *with them* (for to eat I never refused). They were all making merry! in the room,—some had come from friendship, some from busy curiosity, and some from Interest; I was going to partake with them, when my recollection came that my poor dead mother was lying in the next room, the very next room, a mother who thro' life wished nothing but her children's welfare—indignation, the rage of grief, something like remorse, rushed upon my mind in an agony of emotion,—I found my way mechanically to the adjoining room, and fell on my knees by the side of her coffin, asking forgiveness of heaven, and sometimes of her, for forgetting her so soon. Tranquillity returned, and it was the only violent emotion that mastered me, and I think it did me good.

"I mention these things because I hate concealment, and love to give a faithful journal of what passes within me. Our friends have been very good. Sam Le Grice who was then in town was with me the first 3 or 4 first days, and was as a brother to me, gave up every hour of his time, to the very hurting of his health and spirits, in constant attendance and humouring my poor father. Talk'd with him, read to him, play'd at cribbage with him (for so short is the old man's recollection, that he was playing at cards, as tho' nothing had happened, while the Coroner's Inquest was sitting over the way!) Samuel wept tenderly when he went away, for his mother wrote him a very severe letter on his loitering so long in town, and he was forced to go. Mr. Norris of Christ Hospital has been as a father to me, Mrs. Norris as a mother; tho' we had few claims on them. A Gentleman, brother to my God-mother, from whom we never had right or reason to expect any such assistance, sent my father twenty pounds,—and to crown all these God's blessings to our family at such a time, an old Lady, a cousin of my father and Aunt's, a Gentlewoman of fortune, is to

take my Aunt and make her comfortable for the short remainder of her days.

"My Aunt is recover'd and as well as ever, and highly pleased at thoughts of going,—and has generously given up the interest of her little money (which was formerly paid my Father for her board) wholely and solely to my Sister's use. Reckoning this we have, Daddy and I for our two selves and an old maid servant to look after him, when I am out, which will be necessary, £170 or £180 (rather) a year, out of which we can spare 50 or 60 at least for Mary, while she stays at Islington, where she must and shall stay during her father's life for his and her comfort. I know John will make speeches about it, but she shall not go into an hospital. The good Lady of the mad house, and her daughter, an elegant sweet behaved young Lady, love her and are taken with her amazingly, and I know from her own mouth she loves them, and longs to be with them as much.—Poor thing, they say she was but the other morning saying, she knew she must go to Bethlem for life; that one of her brothers would have it so, but the other would wish it not, but be obliged to go with the stream; that she had often as she passed Bedlam thought it likely 'here it may be my fate to end my days—' conscious of a certain flightiness in her poor head oftentimes, and mindful of more than one severe illness of that nature before. A Legacy of £100, which my father will have at Xmas, and this 20 I mentioned before with what is in the house, will much more than set us Clear,—if my father, an old servant maid, and I, can't live and live comfortably on £130 or £120 a year we ought to burn by slow fires, and I almost would, that Mary might not go into an hospital. Let me not leave one unfavourable impression on your mind respecting my Brother. Since this has happened he has been very kind and brotherly; but I fear for his mind,—he has taken his ease in the world, and is not fit himself to struggle with difficulties, nor has much accustomed himself to throw himself into their way,—and I know his language is already, 'Charles, you must take care of yourself, you must not abridge yourself of a single pleasure you have been used to,' &c &c and in that style of talking. But you, a necessarian, can respect a difference of mind, and love what *is amiable* in a character not perfect. He has been very good, but I fear for his mind. Thank God, I can unconnect myself with him, and shall manage all my father's monies in future myself, if I take charge of Daddy,

which poor John has not even hinted a wish, at any future time even, to share with me. . . .

"Of all the people I ever saw in the world my poor sister was most and thoroughly devoid of the least tincture of selfishness—I will enlarge upon her qualities, poor dear dearest soul, in a future letter for my own comfort, for I understand her thoroughly; and if I mistake not in the most trying situation that a human being can be found in, she will be found (I speak not with sufficient humility, I fear, but humanly and foolishly speaking) she will be found, I trust, uniformly great and amiable; God keep her in her present mind, to whom be thanks and praise for all His dispensations to mankind."

On October 17th Lamb writes again, describing his mother's lack of sympathetic understanding with a frankness that he never repeated. "Mary continues serene and chearful,—I have not by me a little letter she wrote to me, for, tho' I see her almost every day yet we delight to write to one another (for we can scarce see each other but in company with some of the people of the house), I have not the letter by me but will quote from memory what she wrote in it. 'I have no bad terrifying dreams. At midnight when I happen to awake, the nurse sleeping by the side of me, with the noise of the poor mad people around me, I have no fear. The spirit of my mother seems to descend, and smile upon me, and bid me live to enjoy the life and reason which the Almighty has given me—I shall see her again in heaven; she will then understand me better; my Grandmother too will understand me better, and will then say no more, as she used to do, "Polly, what are those poor crazy moyther'd brains of yours thinking of always?"

"Poor Mary, my Mother indeed *never understood* her right. She loved her, as she loved us all, with a Mother's love; but in opinion, in feeling, and sentiment, and disposition, bore so distant a resemblance to her daughter, that she never understood her right. Never could believe how much *she* loved her—but met her caresses, her protestations of filial affection, too frequently with coldness and repulse.—Still she was a good mother, God forbid I should think of her but *most* respectfully, *most* affectionately. Yet she would always love my brother above Mary, who was not worthy of one tenth of that affection, which Mary had a right to claim. But it is my sister's gratifying recollection,

that every act of duty and of love she could pay, every kindness (and I speak true, when I say to the hurting of her health, and, most probably, in great part to the derangement of her senses) thro' a long course of infirmities and sickness, she could shew her, SHE EVER DID. I will some day, as I promised, enlarge to you upon my Sister's excellencies; 'twill seem like exaggeration; but I will do it."

Talfourd tells us that Mary Lamb's calm state of mind in respect to the tragedy continued throughout her normal life—fine testimony to her native sense. "Little could any one," he writes, "observing Miss Lamb in the habitual serenity of her demeanour, guess the calamity in which she had partaken, or the malady which frightfully chequered her life. From Mr. Lloyd, who, although saddened by impending delusion, was always found accurate in his recollection of long past events and conversations, I learned that she had described herself, on her recovery from the fatal attack, as having experienced, while it was subsiding, such a conviction, that she was absolved in heaven from all taint of the deed in which she had been the agent—such an assurance that it was a dispensation of Providence for good, though so terrible—such a sense, that her mother knew her entire innocence, and shed down blessings upon her, as though she had seen the reconcilement in solemn vision—that she was not sorely afflicted by the recollection. It was as if the old Greek notion, of the necessity for the unconscious shedder of blood, else polluted though guiltless, to pass through a religious purification, had, in her case, been happily accomplished; so that, not only was she without remorse, but without other sorrow than attends on the death of an infirm parent in a good old age." And on page 17 I have quoted a passage from a letter in which Mary Lamb, in 1803, says that her mother is rarely out of her thoughts.

A little later Coleridge wrote a further consolatory letter, apparently in a similar strain to his first; but the document has not been preserved. It is illustrative of Lamb's clear judgment and inability to countenance what he considered false or wrong, that even under the conditions which prompted Coleridge's letter, and in his own state of grief, he should think it his duty to reply thus (October 24th, 1796): "I read your letters with my sister, and they give us both abundance of delight. Especially they please us two, when you talk in a religious strain,—not

but we are offended occasionally with a certain freedom of expression, a certain air of mysticism, more consonant to the conceits of pagan philosophy, than consistent with the humility of genuine piety. To instance now in your last letter—you say, 'it is by the press [*sic*] that God hath given finite spirits both evil and good (I suppose you mean *simply* bad men and good men), a portion as it were of His Omnipresence!' Now, high as the human intellect comparatively will soar, and wide as its influence, malign or salutary, can extend, is there not, Coleridge, a distance between the Divine Mind and it, which makes such language blasphemy? Again, in your first fine consolatory epistle you say, 'you are a temporary sharer in human misery, that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine Nature.' What more than this do those men say, who are for exalting the man Christ Jesus into the second person of an unknown Trinity,—men, whom you or I scruple not to call idolaters? Man, full of imperfections, at best, and subject to wants which momentarily remind him of dependence; man, a weak and ignorant being, 'servile' from his birth 'to all the skiey influences,' with eyes sometimes open to discern the right path, but a head generally too dizzy to pursue it; man, in the pride of speculation, forgetting his nature, and hailing in himself the future God, must make the angels laugh. Be not angry with me, Coleridge; I wish not to cavil; I know I cannot *instruct* you; I only wish to *remind* you of that humility which best becometh the Christian character. God, in the New Testament (*our best guide*), is represented to us in the kind, condescending, amiable, familiar light of a *parent:* and in my poor mind 'tis best for us so to consider of Him, as our *heavenly* Father, and our *best Friend*, without indulging too bold conceptions of His nature. Let us learn to think humbly of ourselves, and rejoice in the appellation of 'dear children,' 'brethren, and 'co-heirs with Christ of the promises,' seeking to know no further.

"I am not insensible, indeed I am not, of the value of that first letter of yours, and I shall find reason to thank you for it again and again long after that blemish in it is forgotten. It will be a fine lesson of comfort to us, whenever we read it; and read it we often shall, Mary and I."

Coleridge must at once have replied to justify himself, for on

October 28th Lamb returns to the subject: "I am not ignorant that to be a partaker of the Divine Nature is a phrase to be met with in Scripture: I am only apprehensive, lest we in these latter days, tinctured (some of us perhaps pretty deeply) with mystical notions and the pride of metaphysics, might be apt to affix to such phrases a meaning, which the primitive users of them, the simple fishermen of Galilee for instance, never intended to convey. With that other part of your apology I am not quite so well satisfied. You seem to me to have been straining your comparing faculties to bring together things infinitely distant and unlike; the feeble narrow-sphered operations of the human intellect and the everywhere diffused mind of Deity, the peerless wisdom of Jehovah. Even the expression appears to me inaccurate—portion of omnipresence—omnipresence is an attribute whose very essence is unlimitedness. How can omnipresence be affirmed of anything in part? But enough of this spirit of disputatiousness."

The passage of arms is particularly interesting in showing us that a new Lamb had sprung into being. Before the tragedy he was a youth, mistrustful of his powers, fond of his melancholy, a little inclined to self-pity, and, although intellectually vigorous, not unwilling to be dependent and a hero-worshipper. With the tragedy came a rallying of his stronger qualities; the spirit of responsibility informed him; he became a man and the equal of any man, even Coleridge. Henceforward, although frailties beset him and occasionally conquered, he was never anything but himself and he saw nothing but his duty.

In the same letter (October 28th) we have sight of Mary again. "I have satisfaction in being able to bid you rejoice with me in my sister's continued reason and composedness of mind. Let us both be thankful for it. I continue to visit her very frequently, and the people of the house are vastly indulgent to her; she is likely to be as comfortably situated in all respects as those who pay twice or thrice the sum. They love her, and she loves them, and makes herself very useful to them. Benevolence sets out on her journey with a good heart, and puts a good face on it, but is apt to limp and grow feeble, unless she calls in the aid of self-interest by way of crutch. In Mary's case, as far as respects those she is with, 'tis well that these principles are so likely to co-operate. I am rather at a loss sometimes for

books for her,—our reading is somewhat confined, and we have nearly exhausted our London library. She has her hands too full of work to read much, but a little she must read ; for reading was her daily bread."

The letter also gives signs that Lamb's mind was recovering its normal tenor. He was becoming again interested in men and books. "Among all your quaint readings did you ever light upon Walton's 'Complete Angler'? I asked you the question once before ; it breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart ; there are many choice old verses interspersed in it ; it would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it ; it would Christianise every discordant angry passion ; pray make yourself acquainted with it. Have you made it up with Southey yet? Surely one of you two must have been a very silly fellow, and the other not much better, to fall out like boarding-school misses ; kiss, shake hands, and make it up?" Coleridge and Southey had quarrelled nominally over Southey's abandonment of Pantisocracy, when he sailed for Lisbon at the end of 1795 ; but they were probably destined to fall out even had there been no ideal community on the banks of the Susquehannah as a cause of dissension. To have married the sister of Coleridge's wife was probably as good a preparation for disagreement as Southey can have needed, while by temperament, having a stern sense of order and an ingrained Conservatism, he was in many ways Coleridge's antipodes. Southey returned to England in the summer of 1796, and about the time of Lamb's letter a kind of reconciliation was effected, but he never really trusted Coleridge again, nor was Coleridge ever again quite easy in his brother-in-law's company.

## CHAPTER X

### 1796 (*concluded*)

Lines "To a Friend Who Declared His Intention of Writing no more Poetry" —Poems, by Charles Lamb, of the India House—Home Perplexities—Charles Lloyd—Hartley Coleridge Born—Aunt Hetty—Mary Lamb.

IN the letter of September 27th, telling of the tragedy, Lamb had said that he wished to hear no more of his poetry, and that he was burning everything of the kind that he possessed. In a later letter to Coleridge—December 10th, 1796—we get an idea of our loss. "I burned all my own verses, all my book of extracts from Beaumont and Fletcher and a thousand sources: I burned a little journal of my foolish passion which I had a long time kept—

> 'Noting ere they pass away
> The little lines of yesterday.'

I almost burned all your letters,—I did as bad, I lent 'em to a friend to keep out of my brother's sight, should he come and make inquisition into our papers, for, much as he dwelt upon your conversation while you were among us, and delighted to be with you, it has been his fashion ever since to depreciate and cry you down,—you were the cause of my madness—you and your damned foolish sensibility and melancholy—and he lamented with a true brotherly feeling that we ever met, even as the sober citizen, when his son went astray upon the mountains of Parnassus, is said to have 'cursed wit and Poetry and Pope.'"[1]

Coleridge replied to Lamb's renunciation with the lines "To

[1] A slight confusion is in Lamb's mind: the passage in Pope's "Epistle to Arbuthnot" runs:—

> Arthur, whose giddy son neglects the laws,
> Imputes to me and my damned works the cause:
> Poor Cornus sees his frantic wife elope,
> And curses wit, and poetry, and Pope.

a Friend Who has Declared His Intention of Writing no more Poetry":—

Dear Charles! whilst yet thou wert a babe, I ween
That Genius plunged thee in that wizard fount
Hight Castalie: and (sureties of thy faith)
That Pity and Simplicity stood by,
And promised for thee, that thou shouldst renounce
The world's low cares and lying vanities,
Steadfast and rooted in the heavenly Muse,
And washed and sanctified to Poesy.
Yes—thou wert plunged, but with forgetful hand
Held, as by Thetis erst her warrior son:
And with those recreant unbaptised heels
Thou'rt flying from thy bounden ministeries—
So sore it seems and burthensome a task
To weave unwithering flowers! But take thou heed:
For thou art vulnerable, wild-eyed boy,
And I have arrows mystically dipped
Such as may stop thy speed. Is thy Burns dead?
And shall he die unwept, and sink to earth
"Without the meed of one melodious tear"?
Thy Burns, and Nature's own beloved bard,
Who to the "Illustrious of his native Land
So properly did look for patronage."
Ghost of Mæcenas! hide thy blushing face!
They snatched him from the sickle and the plough—
To gauge ale-firkins.
Oh! for shame return!
On a bleak rock, midway the Aonian mount,
There stands a lone and melancholy tree,
Whose aged branches to the midnight blast
Make solemn music: pluck its darkest bough,
Ere yet the unwholesome night-dew be exhaled,
And weeping wreathe it round thy Poet's tomb.
Then in the outskirts, where pollutions grow,
Pick the rank henbane and the dusky flowers
Of night-shade, or its red and tempting fruit,
These with stopped nostril and glove-guarded hand
Knit in nice intertexture, so to twine,
The illustrious brow of Scotch Nobility.

This poem Lamb also burned, at once; but he soon came to a more reasonable view of things. In spite of sorrow and calamity, one's life must go forward, one's destiny be fulfilled. Lamb's destiny was to write, and by November his interest in writing had begun to revive. "The Fragments I now send you I want printed to get rid of 'em; for, while they stick burr-like to my memory, they tempt me to go on with the idle trade of

versifying, which I long—most sincerely I speak it, I long to leave off, for it is unprofitable to my soul; I feel it is; and these questions about words, and debates about alterations, take me off, I am conscious, from the properer business of *my* life. Take my sonnets once for all, and do not propose any re-amendments, or mention them again in any shape to me, I charge you. I blush that my mind can consider them as things of any worth. And pray admit or reject these fragments, as you like or dislike them, without ceremony. Call 'em Sketches, Fragments, or what you will, but do not entitle any of my *things* Love Sonnets, as I told you to call 'em; 'twill only make me look little in my own eyes; for it is a passion of which I retain *nothing;* 'twas a weakness, concerning which I may say, in the words of Petrarch (whose life is now open before me), 'if it drew me out of some vices, it also prevented the growth of many virtues, filling me with the love of the creature rather than the Creator, which is the death of the soul.' Thank God, the folly has left me for ever; not even a review of my love verses renews one wayward wish in me; and if I am at all solicitous to trim 'em out in their best apparel, it is because they are to make their appearance in good company."

Lamb returned to the subject of his verses a few days later. "I mean to inscribe them [the poems] to my sister. It will be unexpected, and it will give her pleasure; or do you think it will look whimsical at all? As I have not spoke to her about it, I can easily reject the idea. But there is a monotony in the affections, which people living together or, as we do now, very frequently seeing each other, are apt to give in to: a sort of indifference in the expression of kindness for each other, which demands that we should sometimes call to our aid the trickery of surprise."

He goes on to say that the title-page is to stand thus:—

POEMS,

CHIEFLY LOVE SONNETS,

BY

CHARLES LAMB, OF THE INDIA HOUSE.

"Under this title the following motto, which, for want of room, I put over leaf, and desire you to insert, whether you

like it or no. May not a gentleman choose what arms, mottoes, or armorial bearings the herald will give him leave, without consulting his republican friend, who might advise none? May not a publican put up a sign of the Saracen's Head, even though his undiscerning neighbour should prefer, as more genteel, the Cat and Gridiron?

> "This beauty, in the blossom of my youth,
> When my first fire knew no adulterate incense,
> Nor I no way to flatter but my fondness,
> In the best language my true tongue could tell me,
> And all the broken sighs my sick heart lend me,
> I sued and served. Long did I love this lady."
>
> MASSINGER.

## THE DEDICATION.

THE FEW FOLLOWING POEMS,
CREATURES OF THE FANCY AND THE FEELING
IN LIFE'S MORE VACANT HOURS,
PRODUCED, FOR THE MOST PART, BY
LOVE IN IDLENESS,
ARE,
WITH ALL A BROTHER'S FONDNESS,
INSCRIBED TO
MARY ANN LAMB,
THE AUTHOR'S BEST FRIEND AND SISTER.

"This is the pomp and paraphernalia of parting, with which I take my leave of a passion which has reigned so royally (so long) within me; thus, with its trappings of laureatship, I fling it off, pleased and satisfied with myself that the weakness troubles me no longer. I am wedded, Coleridge, to the fortunes of my sister and my poor old father. Oh! my friend, I think sometimes, could I recall the days that are past, which among them should I choose? not those 'merrier days,' not the 'pleasant days of hope,' not 'those wanderings with a fair hair'd maid,' which I have so often and so feelingly regretted, but the days, Coleridge, of a *mother's* fondness for her *school-boy*. What would I give to call her back to earth for *one* day, on my knees to ask her pardon for all those little asperities of temper which, from time to time, have given her gentle spirit pain; and the day, my friend, I trust will come; there will be 'time enough'

for kind offices of love, if 'Heaven's eternal year' be ours. Hereafter, her meek spirit shall not reproach me. Oh, my friend, cultivate the filial feelings! and let no man think himself released from the kind 'charities' of relationship: these shall give him peace at the last; these are the best foundation for every species of benevolence."

Lamb's next letter to Coleridge—December 2nd, 1796—is mainly criticism of the projected second edition of the *Poems*. But we have also this light on his home: "Are we NEVER to meet again? How differently I am circumstanced now—I have never met with any one, never shall meet with any one, who could or can compensate me for the loss of your society—I have no one to talk all these matters about too—I lack friends, I lack books to supply their absence. But these complaints ill become me: let me compare my present situation, prospects, and state of mind, with what they were but 2 months back—*but* 2 months. O my friend, I am in danger of forgetting the awful lessons then presented to me—remind me of them; remind me of my Duty. Talk seriously with me when you do write.

"I thank you, from my heart I thank you for your sollicitude about my Sister. She is quite well,—but must not, I fear, come to live with us yet a good while. In the first place, because at present it would hurt her, and hurt my father, for them to be together: secondly from a regard to the world's good report, for I fear, I fear, tongues will be busy *whenever* that event takes place. Some have hinted, one man has prest it on me, that she should be in perpetual confinement—what she hath done to deserve, or the necessity of such an hardship, I see not; do you?[1] I am starving at the India House, near 7 o'clock without my dinner, and so it has been and will be almost all the week. I get home at night o'erwearied, quite faint,—and then to CARDS with my father, who will not let me enjoy a meal in peace—but I must conform to my situation, and I hope I am, for the most part, not unthankful.

"I am got home at last, and, after repeated games at Cribbage have got my father's leave to write awhile: with difficulty got

[1] It is generally considered that the "one man" who urged that Mary Lamb should remain in perpetual confinement was John Lamb the younger.

it, for when I expostulated about playing any more, he very aptly replied, 'If you won't play with me, you might as well not come home at all.' The argument was unanswerable, and I set to afresh."

Meanwhile Coleridge had taken a pupil, Charles Lloyd of Birmingham, the son of a Quaker banker and philanthropist, whom he had met on his tour in search of subscribers to the *Watchman*. Charles Lloyd, who was a few days older than Lamb, had been intended for his father's bank, but his health and tastes were alike opposed to the plan. He therefore went to Edinburgh to study medicine, but soon abandoning that project, became an inmate of the house of Thomas Wilkinson, Wordsworth's friend, at Yanwath, where, in 1795, he wrote and published his first volume of poems—one of the songs in which is supposed to have furnished Lamb with the name Rosamund Gray. It was early in 1796 that Coleridge and Lloyd met, and later in the year it was arranged that Lloyd should join Coleridge at Bristol, as pupil, friend and fellow-poet and philosopher. Coleridge addressed to him some enthusiastic verses on their union, entitled, with a ponderosity to which Coleridge was at no time of his life a stranger, "To a Young Friend on his Proposing to Domesticate with the Author," in which (for at that time Coleridge was capable of all) we find these lines:—

> Ah! dearest youth! it were a lot divine
> To cheat our noons in moralising mood,
> While west winds fanned our temples toil-bedewed:
> Then downwards slope, oft pausing, from the mount,
> To some lone mansion, in some woody dale,
> Where smiling with blue eye, Domestic Bliss
> Gives *this* the Husband's, *that* the Brother's kiss!

Lloyd accompanied Coleridge to Bristol in September, to find, on their arrival, the new-born David Hartley Coleridge; and Lloyd was quickly honoured by becoming the recipient of the sonnet "To a Friend who asked, How I felt when the Nurse first presented my Infant to me." A few days later Coleridge informed Thomas Poole in a letter that Lloyd was winning upon him hourly, and he copied out two sonnets which Lloyd, "a man of great genius," had written in an evening at Birmingham, one of which alluded to the "Conviction of the truth of Christianity," which he had received from Coleridge, having been previously

"if not a deist yet quite a sceptic." So began a companionship that, in Lamb's phrase, ought to develop into "Elysium on earth." To tell here the whole story of the falsification of Lamb's forecast would be out of place. We shall see enough of the friendship's progress and decay in the course of the next few months in Lamb's life.

Lloyd, who had lately lost his maternal grandmother, had addressed to that lady's memory a number of poems marked by strong affection, which had been sumptuously published by Joseph Cottle of Bristol. The volume was entitled *Poems on the Death of Priscilla Farmer* and it contained Lamb's fragment "The Grandame," which Lloyd, who had seen it in manuscript, was anxious to include. Early in December Coleridge sent the volume to Lamb, together with a privately printed collection of sonnets by various contemporary writers, including himself, Lloyd and Lamb, which he had arranged to be bound up with the sonnets of his and Lamb's beloved Bowles. On December 9th, in acknowledging the gift, Lamb says that his sister is pretty well, and he gives some news of Aunt Hetty and the wealthy relation (whose identity cannot be discovered) with whom she had gone to live. "The old hag of a wealthy relation, who took my aunt off our hands in the beginning of trouble, has found out that she is 'indolent and mulish'—I quote her own words—and that her attachment to us is so strong that she can never be happy apart. The Lady, with delicate Irony, remarks that, if I am not an Hypocrite, I shall rejoyce to receive her again; and that it will be a means of making me more fond of home to have so dear a friend to come home to! The fact is, she is jealous of my aunt's bestowing any kind recollections on us, while she enjoys the patronage of her roof. She says she finds it inconsistent with her own 'ease and tranquility' to keep her any longer, & in fine summons me to fetch her home. Now, much as I should rejoyce to transplant the poor old creature from the chilling air of such patronage, yet I know how straitend we are already. . . ." Aunt Hetty, however, came home; but, as we shall see, not for long.

On December 10th Lamb writes again, mentioning how much he lacks one or two understanding friends, especially at the office. He adds: "I can only converse with you by letter and with the dead in their books. My sister, indeed, is all I can

wish in a companion; but our spirits are alike poorly, our reading and knowledge from the self-same sources, our communication with the scenes of the world alike narrow: never having kept separate company, or any 'company' '*together*'—never having read separate books, and few books *together*—what knowledge have we to convey to each other? In our little range of duties and connexions, how few sentiments can take place without friends, with few books, with a taste for religion rather than a strong religious habit! We need some support, some leading-strings to cheer and direct us." This is the last letter of 1796 that has been preserved.

It was on the last day of 1796, as I conjecture, that John Lamb, Charles Lamb and Aunt Hetty (and perhaps John Lamb junior, but I am doubtful) moved finally from 7 Little Queen Street, that house of shadow, to 45 Chapel Street, Pentonville, very near the Angel Tavern, and not far from the Islington madhouse where Mary Lamb was living.

## CHAPTER XI

### 1797

Charles Lloyd in London—Quakers—Death of Aunt Hetty—Coleridge and Lloyd's First Breach—Mary Lamb Leaves the Asylum—Nether Stowey—Hazlitt's Description of Coleridge and Wordsworth—Dorothy Wordsworth—Lamb at Southey's—Poems on Mrs. Lamb—The Higginbottom Sonnets.

IN one of the first letters of 1797—January 10th—Lamb tells Coleridge that Mary Lamb has been seriously ill, but has "nigh recovered." It contains this passage on Lamb's state of mind: "My letter is full of nothingness. I talk of nothing. But I must talk. I love to write to you. I take a pride in it. It makes me think less meanly of myself. It makes me think myself not totally disconnected from the better part of Mankind. I know, I am too dissatisfied with the beings around me,—but I cannot help occasionally exclaiming 'Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Meshech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar.' I know I am no ways better in practice than my neighbours—but I have a taste for religion, an occasional earnest aspiration after perfection, which they have not. I gain nothing by being with such as myself—we encourage one another in mediocrity—I am always longing to be with men more excellent than myself. All this must sound odd to you; but these are my predominant feelings, when I sit down to write to you, and I should put force upon my mind, were I to reject them. Yet I rejoyce, and feel my privilege with gratitude, when I have been reading some wise book, such as I have just been reading, Priestley on Philosophical necessity, in the thought that I enjoy a kind of communion, a kind of friendship even, with the great and good. Books are to me instead of friends. I wish they did not resemble the latter in their scarceness."

Early in January Charles Lloyd, visiting London, called on Lamb, one result of the meeting being the verses "To Charles Lloyd, an Unexpected Visitor," which Lamb sent to Coleridge on January 16th. From the warmth of feeling in this poem we may gather something of Lamb's loneliness at that time:—

O! sweet are all the Muses' lays,
And sweet the charm of matin bird—
'Twas long, since these estranged ears
The sweeter voice of friend had heard.

The voice hath spoke: the pleasant sounds
In memory's ear, in after-time
Shall live, to sometimes rouse a tear,
And sometimes prompt an honest rhyme.

For when the transient charm is fled,
And when the little week is o'er,
To cheerless, friendless solitude
When I return, as heretofore—

Long, long, within my aching heart,
The grateful sense shall cherish'd be;
I'll think less meanly of myself,
That Lloyd will sometimes think on me.

We can understand how at such a time Lloyd's sympathy and seriousness of mind would have appealed to Lamb. As Lamb wrote on another occasion, he was "all kindness," his defects in those days being for the most part the defects of that quality. Lloyd, on his part, as he told his brother Robert, in a letter, was "warmly interested" in Lamb's "favour" . . . "he is a most interesting young man."

Lloyd had left behind him, as a souvenir, the Journal of John Woolman, the American Quaker, whose slender writings form a record of beautiful spiritual character and simple moral courage. ("Get them by heart," was Lamb's advice in his *Elia* essay on "A Quakers' Meeting.") The book seems to have had an immediate influence, for in the letter to Coleridge of February 13th Lamb says: "Tell Lloyd I have had thoughts of turning Quaker, and have been reading, or am rather just beginning to read, a most capital book, good thoughts in good language, William Penn's 'No Cross, no Crown;' I like it immensely. Unluckily I went to one of his meetings, tell him, in St. John Street, yesterday, and saw a man under all

the agitations and workings of a fanatic, who believed himself under the influence of some 'inevitable presence.' This cured me of Quakerism ; I love it in the books of Penn and Woolman, but I detest the vanity of a man thinking he speaks by the Spirit, when what he says an ordinary man might say without all that quaking and trembling." The incident recurs in the essay of "A Quakers' Meeting," written twenty-four years later, but in much the same words—one of the many instances of Lamb's gift of keeping together all his thoughts on every subject.

Throughout his life, as that essay indicates, the simple grey creed of the Quakers had a certain fascination for Charles Lamb ; but he never again came so near an acceptance of it as after Lloyd's visit. After the defection of Lloyd, and the death of Hester Savory, he seems to have been without Quaker acquaintances until the beginning of his friendship with Bernard Barton, in 1822. Hood describes him as affecting in his dress a plainness that might easily have caused strangers, in those days when Quakers were less of this world, to mistake him for one of the Foxian community.

In February Lamb lost his old friend Aunt Hetty. Writing to Coleridge on February 5th (misdated January 5th), Lamb says : "My poor old aunt, whom you have seen, the kindest, goodest creature to me when I was at school ; who used to toddle there to bring me fag, when I, school-boy like, only despised her for it, and used to be ashamed to see her come and sit herself down on the old coal hole steps as you went into the old grammar school, and open her apron and bring out her bason, with some nice thing she had caused to be saved for me ;—the good old creature is now lying on her death bed. I cannot bear to think on her deplorable state. To the shock she received on that our evil day, from which she never completely recovered, I impute her illness. She says, poor thing, she is glad she is come home to die with me. I was always her favourite :

> 'No after friendship e'er can raise
> The endearments of our early days,
> Nor e'er the heart such fondness prove,
> As when it first began to love.' "

Sarah Lamb was buried at St. James's, Clerkenwell, on February 13th, 1797. Her nephew on the day of her funeral wrote

a poem (printed in *Blank Verse*, 1798) of which this is the opening :—

> Thou too art dead, [Aunt Hetty]! very kind
> Hast thou been to me in my childish days,
> Thou best good creature. I have not forgot
> How thou didst love thy Charles, when he was yet
> A prating schoolboy : I have not forgot
> The busy joy on that important day,
> When, child-like, the poor wanderer was content
> To leave the bosom of parental love,
> His childhood's play-place, and his early home,
> For the rude fosterings of a stranger's hand,
> Hard uncouth tasks, and school-boy's scanty fare.
> How did thine eye peruse him round and round,
> And hardly know him in his yellow coats,
> Red leathern belt, and gown of russet blue!
> Farewell, good aunt!
> Go thou, and occupy the same grave-bed
> Where the dead mother lies.

Nearly two months elapse before the next letter, and then—on April 7th—we find Lamb complaining to Coleridge of his long silence. "Do what you will, Col., you may hurt me and vex me by your silence, but you cannot estrange my heart from you all. I cannot scatter friendship like chuck-farthings, nor let them drop from mine hand like hour-glass sand. I have two or three people in the world to whom I am more than indifferent, and I can't afford to whistle them off to the winds." The letter also says : "Lloyd tells me he has been very ill, and was on the point of leaving you. I addressed a letter to him at Birmingham : perhaps he got it not, and is still with you. I hope his ill-health has not prevented his attending to a request I made in it, that he would write again very soon to let me know how he was. I hope to God poor Lloyd is not very bad, or in a very bad way. Pray satisfy me about these things." Here we may see part of the reason of Coleridge's silence. The fact is, I think, that Coleridge's dissatisfaction with Lloyd, which was to become acute, had already set in. It is possible that Coleridge, who was not above the human weakness of jealousy, resented Lloyd's intimacy with Lamb ; more probably Lloyd had repeated at Nether Stowey some epigram upon Coleridge which Lamb had let drop, not malicious in itself, but malicious when indiscreetly passed on by a third person. At any rate there was the beginning of a breach between the two, and Lloyd, after

staying for a while with Poole at Nether Stowey, on his return from London in February, finally left Coleridge's roof in March, and returned to Birmingham. The matter is involved in mystery, but I think we may fairly assume Coleridge's silence to be in some way connected with it.

The letter of April 7th also says of Mary Lamb that her brother has taken her out of her confinement, and placed her in lodgings at Hackney, where he spends his Sundays, holidays, and odd time with her. "She boards herself. In one little half year's illness, and in such an illness of such a nature and of such consequences! to get her out into the world again, with a prospect of her never being so ill again—this is to be ranked not among the common blessings of Providence. May that merciful God make tender my heart, and make me as thankful, as in my distress I was earnest in my prayers. Congratulate me on an ever-present and never-alienable friend like her."

On April 15th we hear of Lloyd again. "Poor dear Lloyd! I had a letter from him yesterday; his state of mind is truly alarming. He has, by his own confession, kept a letter of mine unopened three weeks, afraid, he says, to open it, lest I should speak upbraidingly to him; and yet this very letter of mine was in answer to one, wherein he informed me that an alarming illness had alone prevented him from writing. You will pray with me, I know, for his recovery; for surely, Coleridge, an exquisiteness of feeling like this must border on derangement. But I love him more and more, and will not give up the hope of his speedy recovery, as he tells me he is under Dr. Darwin's regimen."

The next letter—June 13th—acknowledges, at last, a letter from Coleridge containing another invitation to Stowey. This, as it happened, Lamb was to accept. There are references to Lloyd, from whom Lamb seems to have been receiving letters, and who seems to be better. Meanwhile the second edition of Coleridge's *Poems*, with Lamb and Lloyd's contributions, was at the printers. It is indicative of Lamb's loneliness, his lack of friends, that when referring in one of his letters to this forthcoming book he asks for only two copies. "2 will be enough —or indeed 1—but 2 better." A young poet usually has need of many copies of his first book.

Lamb was at Stowey in June. We have no outside informa-

tion of his visit beyond Coleridge's poem "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison," written while Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth and Lamb were walking out together, Coleridge being confined to the garden by an accident during the visit. The poem has a patronising tone which is not wholly agreeable, as though the country had no secrets left for the author and nothing but secrets for the unformed youth from town.

> Yes! they wander on
> In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
> My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
> And hungered after Nature, many a year,
> In the great City pent, winning thy way
> With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
> And strange calamity! . . .
>
> My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
> Beat its straight path along the dusky air
> Homewards, I blest it! deeming, its black wing
> (Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
> Had cross'd the mighty orb's dilated glory,
> While thou stood'st gazing; or when all was still,
> Flew creeking o'er thy head, and had a charm
> For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
> No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

(When these verses were printed in the *Annual Anthology* in 1800, Lamb wrote to Coleridge: "For God's sake (I never was more serious), don't make me ridiculous any more by terming me gentle-hearted in print, or do it in better verses. It did well enough five [three] years ago when I came to see you, and was moral coxcomb enough at the time you wrote the lines to feed upon such epithets; but, besides that, the meaning of gentle is equivocal at best, and almost always means poor-spirited, the very quality of gentleness is abhorrent to such vile trumpetings. My *sentiment* is long since vanished. I hope my *virtues* have done *sucking*. I can scarce think but you meant it in joke. I hope you did, for I should be ashamed to think that you could think to gratify me by such praise, fit only to be a cordial to some green-sick sonneteer." He adds, in a letter a few days later: "In the next edition of the 'Anthology' (which Phœbus avert and those nine other wandering maids also!) please to blot out gentle-hearted, and substitute drunken-dog, ragged-head, seld-shaven, odd-eyed, stuttering, or any other epithet which

truly and properly belongs to the gentleman in question. And for Charles read Tom, or Bob, or Richard, for more delicacy." Mr. William Archer in a recent essay on Lamb has a passage on his gentleness which it is a pleasure to quote: "We may call him 'gentle' in the sense in which we apply the term to Chaucer, to Izaak Walton, to Goldsmith, to Scott, and could not possibly apply it to Milton, or Johnson, or Byron, or Carlyle. So far is the epithet for conveying any suggestion of effeminacy that one is tempted to say with Antony:—

> 'His life was gentle; and the elements
> So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, "This was a man!"'")

William Hazlitt, whom Lamb was not to meet until a few years later, was at Stowey in the spring of 1798, nine months later, and he has left descriptions of the two poets at that time which help to add vividness to our impression of Lamb's visit. Coleridge he thus describes in his essay "My First Acquaintance with the Poets" (written in 1817 and 1823): "His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent; his chin good-humoured and round; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done. It might seem that the genius of his face as from a height surveyed and projected him (with sufficient capacity and huge aspiration) into the world unknown of thought and imagination, with nothing to support or guide his veering purpose, as if Columbus had launched his adventurous course for the New World in a scallop, without oars or compass. So at least I comment on it after the event. Coleridge, in his person, was rather above the common size, inclining to the corpulent, or like Lord Hamlet, 'somewhat fat and pursy.' His hair (now, alas! grey) was then black and glossy as the raven's, and fell in smooth masses over his forehead. This long pendulous hair is peculiar to enthusiasts, to those whose minds tend heavenward; and is traditionally inseparable (though of a different colour) from the pictures of Christ. It ought to belong, as a character, to all who preach *Christ crucified*, and Coleridge was at that time one of those!"

And here is Wordsworth, who in 1798 was twenty-eight years of age, by five years Lamb's senior: "He answered in some

S. T. COLERIDGE IN 1798

FROM THE DRAWING BY HANCOCK IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge, in his gait, not unlike his own 'Peter Bell.' There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits; but he was teased into making it regular and heavy: Haydon's head of him, introduced into the 'Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem,' is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine. He instantly began to make havoc of the half of a Cheshire cheese on the table, and said, triumphantly, that 'his marriage with experience had not been so productive as Mr. Southey's in teaching him a knowledge of the good things of this life.' He had been to see the 'Castle Spectre,' by Monk Lewis, while at Bristol, and described it very well. He said 'it fitted the taste of the audience like a glove.' This *ad captandum* merit was, however, by no means a recommendation of it, according to the severe principles of the new school, which reject rather than court popular effect. Wordsworth, looking out of the low, latticed window, said, 'How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!'"

Of Dorothy Wordsworth we have Coleridge's classic description, preserved in Cottle's *Reminiscences*, in a letter belonging to 1797. "Wordsworth and his exquisite sister are with me. She is a woman indeed! in mind I mean, and heart; for her person is such, that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her rather ordinary; if you expected to see an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty! but her manners are simple, ardent, impressive. In every motion, her most innocent soul outbeams so brightly, that who saw would say,

'Guilt was a thing impossible in her.'

Her information various. Her eye watchful in minutest observation of nature; and her taste, a perfect electrometer. It bends, protrudes, and draws in, at subtlest beauties, and most recondite faults."

Wordsworth, in the summer of 1797, was just about to move to Alfoxden, his "large mansion in a large park with seventy head of deer," and to begin his partnership with Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads*. He had written already only his "Poetical Sketches," "Guilt and Sorrow" and "The Borderers:" his real work was all before him. To what extent Lamb was stimulated intellectually by his intercourse with the Wordsworths we do not know; but probably it was the renewed ambition with which he returned to London from this visit that set him to work upon *John Woodvil* and *Rosamund Gray*. The early chapters of *Rosamund Gray*, which have a childlike simplicity and clarity, may indeed be said to be Lamb's contribution to the war against convention which the *Lyrical Ballads* chiefly waged. Neither Wordsworth nor his sister mentions Lamb at Nether Stowey, and we do not know to what extent he was in their company; but the friendship thus begun lasted to the end.

On returning from Stowey Lamb wrote to Coleridge, probably at the end of July or early August, recalling the pleasure of the visit. "You will oblige me too by sending me my great-coat, which I left behind in the oblivious state the mind is thrown into at parting—is it not ridiculous that I sometimes envy that great-coat lingering so cunningly behind?—at present I have none—so send it me by a Stowey waggon, if there be such a thing, directing for C. L., No. 45, Chapel-Street, Pentonville, near London. But above all, *that Inscription!* —it will recall to me the tones of all your voices—and with them many a remembered kindness to one who could and can repay you all only by the silence of a grateful heart.[1] I could not talk much, while I was with you, but my silence was not sullenness, nor I hope from any bad motive; but, in truth, disuse has made me awkward at it. I know I behaved myself, particularly at Tom Poole's, and at Cruikshank's, most like a sulky child; but company and converse are strange to me. It

[1] Wordsworth's "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew Tree."

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH IN 1798

FROM THE DRAWING BY HANCOCK IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

was kind in you all to endure me as you did." Lamb also says that he had looked out for John Thelwall on the way back but had not seen him—Thelwall being "Citizen Thelwall," one of the companions of Hardy and Horne Tooke in the Tower in 1794, a friend of Coleridge, and afterwards, as we shall see, of Lamb too. He had abandoned Republicanism for the moment and was farming on the Wye.

*Poems by S. T. Coleridge. Second Edition. To which are now added Poems by Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd* was published in the summer of 1797. It had as motto a passage purporting to come from Groscollius, meaning "Double is the bond which binds us—friendship, and a kindred taste in poetry. Would that neither death nor lapse of time could dissolve it!" As we shall see, the bond was to be dissolved within a very few months. In this little volume Lamb was allowed to have his own way in all things: the text of his poems was untouched by Coleridge, and the dedication to his sister stood as he had wished. The book made very little impression.

The week at Nether Stowey was not to be Lamb's only period of absence in 1797. A letter to Coleridge, dated August 24th, tells of a sudden visit to Southey, at Burton, in Hampshire. Lamb accompanied Charles Lloyd, just then in a state of unhappy perplexity about his engagement to Sophia Pemberton, whose parents disapproved of the match. "He meant to return with me, who could stay only one night. While there, he at one time thought of going to consult you, but changed his intention and stayed behind with Southey, and wrote an explicit letter to Sophia. I came away on the Tuesday, and on the Saturday following, *last Saturday*, receiv'd a letter dated Bath, in which he said he was on his way to Birmingham—that Southey was accompanying him—and that he went for the purpose of persuading Sophia to a Scotch marriage. . . . He said if he *had* come to you, he could never have brought himself to leave you." Lamb also says that he has since had no news. (I may here anticipate a little and say that Lloyd did marry Sophia Pemberton, but not until 1799, and according to ordinary procedure.)

In September Lamb sends Coleridge one of his most touching poems, afterwards included in *Blank Verse*, published in 1798, suggested by the anniversary of his mother's death:—

"Thou and I, dear friend,
With filial recognition sweet, shall know
One day the face of our dear mother in heaven,
And her remember'd looks of love shall greet
With answering looks of love, her placid smiles
Meet with a smile as placid, and her hand
With drops of fondness wet, nor fear repulse.

"Be witness for me, Lord, I do not ask
Those days of vanity to return again
(Nor fitting me to ask, nor thee to give),
Vain loves, and "wanderings with a fair-hair'd maid;"
(Child of the dust as I am), who so long
My foolish heart steep'd in idolatry,
And creature-loves. Forgive it, O my Maker!
If in a mood of grief, I sin almost
In sometimes brooding on the days long past,
(And from the grave of time wishing them back),
Days of a mother's fondness to her child—
Her little one! Oh, where be now those sports
And infant play-games? Where the joyous troops
Of children, and the haunts I did so love?
O my companions! O ye loved names
Of friend, or playmate dear, gone are ye now.
Gone divers ways; to honour and credit some:
And some, I fear, to ignominy and shame!
I only am left, with unavailing grief
One parent dead to mourn, and see one live
Of all life's joys bereft, and desolate:
Am left, with a few friends, and one above
The rest, found faithful in a length of years,
Contented as I may, to bear me on,
T' the not unpeaceful evening of a day
Made black by morning storms."

The dear friend of the first line is of course Mary Lamb; the one friend above the rest, at the close of the poem, is, I have no doubt, Coleridge.

In the volume entitled *Blank Verse*, which Lamb and Charles Lloyd published together, the following poem, dated October, 1797, is placed next that from which I have just quoted:—

WRITTEN SOON AFTER THE PRECEDING POEM

Thou should'st have longer liv'd, and to the grave
Have peacefully gone down in full old age!
Thy children would have tended thy gray hairs.
We might have sat, as we have often done,
By our fireside, and talk'd whole nights away,
Old times, old friends, and old events recalling;

With many a circumstance, of trivial note,
To memory dear, and of importance grown.
How shall we tell them in a stranger's ear?
A wayward son ofttimes was I to thee;
And yet, in all our little bickerings,
Domestic jars, there was, I know not what,
Of tender feeling, that were ill exchang'd
For this world's chilling friendships, and their smiles
Familiar, whom the heart calls strangers still.
A heavy lot hath he, most wretched man!
Who lives the last of all his family.
He looks around him, and his eye discerns
The face of the stranger, and his heart is sick.
Man of the world, what canst thou do for him?
Wealth is a burden, which he could not bear;
Mirth a strange crime, the which he dares not act;
And wine no cordial, but a bitter cup.
For wounds like his Christ is the only cure,
And gospel promises are his by right,
For these were given to the poor in heart.
Go, preach thou to him of a world to come,
Where friends shall meet, and know each other's face.
Say less than this, and say it to the winds.

This poem and those belonging to the same period were, with the exception of two veiled references in the *Elia* essays, the last of Lamb's published writings in which his mother is mentioned —a silence which we may assume was due partly to his own disinclination to recall poignant memories, but even more to the wish not to distress his sister, who, after joining him in 1799, would naturally read all he wrote. Yet the evidence of Talfourd is that there was no call for any such reticence. Mary Lamb, he says, "never shrank from alluding to her mother, when any topic connected with her own youth made such a reference, in ordinary respects, natural; but spoke of her as though no fearful remembrance was associated with the image; so that some of her most intimate friends, who knew of the disaster, believed that she had never become aware of her own share in its horrors. It is still more singular that, in the wanderings of her insanity, amidst all the vast throngs of imagery she presented of her early days, this picture never recurred, or, if ever, not associated with shapes of terror." None the less I believe Lamb to have abstained from reference to his mother largely from fear of any possible effect upon his sister. One may be more sensitive for others than they are for themselves.

In the same September letter—the last of 1797—Lamb

remarks: "You use Lloyd very ill, never writing to him. I tell you again that his is not a mind with which you should play tricks. He deserves more tenderness from you. For myself, I must spoil a little passage of Beaumont and Fletcher to adapt it to my feelings :—

> 'I am prouder
> That I was once your friend, tho' now forgot,
> Than to have had another true to me' "—

for not only had Coleridge not written, but Lamb was still waiting for his great-coat.

Meanwhile Lloyd was at Bath with Southey; and that would be another cause of resentment to Coleridge, since Southey and he were doomed to be on bad terms. That Coleridge entertained mischievous feelings is certain, as it must have been at this time that he composed the unlucky Higginbottom satire—a series of three sonnets in ridicule of himself and his two poetical associates, printed in November, 1797, in the *Monthly Magazine*, a periodical in which Lloyd and Lamb's verses had frequently appeared. Writing to Cottle, Coleridge says that the sonnets expose "that affectation of affectedness, of jumping and misplaced accent, in commonplace epithets, flat lines forced into poetry by italics (signifying how well and mouthishly the author would read them), puny pathos, etc., etc. . . . I think they may do good to our young Bards." This is one of the three :—

TO SIMPLICITY

O! I do love thee, meek *Simplicity!*
For of thy lays the lulling simpleness
Goes to my heart and soothes each small distress,
Distress though small, yet haply great to me!
'Tis true on Lady Fortune's gentlest pad
I amble on; yet, though I know not why,
*So* sad I am!—but should a friend and I
Grow cool and *miff*, O! I am *very* sad!
And then with sonnets and with sympathy
My dreamy bosom's mystic woes I pall;
Now of my false friend plaining plaintively.
Now raving at mankind in general;
But, whether sad or fierce, 'tis simple all,
All very simple, meek Simplicity![1]

[1] As we shall see, Southey, who was not in Higginbottom's mind at all when he wrote the sonnets, took "Simplicity" to be an attack upon himself. Southey, it might be added, became also a satirist of contemporary versifiers, inventing in Coleridge's manner a futile poet, named, with equal humour, Abel Shufflebottom.

We have no record of Lamb's feelings on reading the parodies; nor indeed was there reason for him to resent them, his verse being far more genuine, and less vulnerable, than that of either of his companions. But Lloyd probably suffered much, especially as many of his more intimate poems, here ridiculed, had been composed in the society of the parodist and had had his approval at the time.

## CHAPTER XII

### 1798

Mary Lamb Again Ill—"The Old Familiar Faces"—The Alienation of Coleridge—Theses Quædam Theologicæ—Exit Charles Lloyd—The Anti-Jacobins—Lamb Hits Back.

LAMB and Coleridge cannot have fallen out, for on January 28th, 1798, Lamb says, "You have writ me many kind letters, and I have answered none of them." The reason was that Mary Lamb had had a relapse, necessitating removal from her Hackney lodging and a return to restraint. The attack must have occurred in December, for in the *Blank Verse* volume is a poem which clearly refers to it :—

WRITTEN ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1797

I am a widow'd thing, now thou art gone!
Now thou art gone, my own familiar friend,
Companion, sister, help-mate, counsellor!
Alas! that honour'd mind, whose sweet reproof
And meekest wisdom in times past have smooth'd
The unfilial harshness of my foolish speech,
And made me loving to my parents old,
(Why is this so, ah God! why is this so?)
That honour'd mind become a fearful blank,
Her senses lock'd up, and herself kept out
From human sight or converse, while so many
Of the foolish sort are left to roam at large,
Doing all acts of folly, and sin, and shame?
Thy paths are mystery!
Yet I will not think,
Sweet friend, but we shall one day meet, and live
In quietness, and die so, fearing God.
Or if *not*, and these false suggestions be
A fit of the weak nature, loth to part
With what it lov'd so long, and held so dear;
If thou art to be taken, and I left
(More sinning, yet unpunish'd, save in thee),

*Charles Lamb (aged 23)*
*From the drawing by Robert Hancock in 1798*
*now in the National Portrait Gallery.*

> It is the will of God, and we are clay
> In the potter's hands; and, at the worst, are made
> From absolute nothing, vessels of disgrace,
> Till, his most righteous purpose wrought in us,
> Our purified spirits find their perfect rest.

Lamb's letter to Coleridge of January 28th continues: "An unnatural indifference has been creeping on me since my last misfortunes, or I should have seized the first opening of a correspondence with *you*. To you I owe much under God. In my brief acquaintance with you in London, your conversations won me to the better cause, and rescued me from the polluting spirit of the world. I might have been a worthless character without you; as it is, I do possess a certain improvable portion of devotional feelings, tho' when I view myself in the light of divine truth, and not according to the common measures of human judgment, I am altogether corrupt and sinful. This is no cant. I am very sincere.

"These last afflictions, Coleridge, have failed to soften and bend my will. They found me unprepared. My former calamities produced in me a spirit of humility and a spirit of prayer. I thought they had sufficiently disciplined me; but the event ought to humble me. If God's judgments now fail to take away from me the heart of stone, what more grievous trials ought I not to expect? I have been very querulous, impatient under the rod—full of little jealousies and heart-burnings.—I had well nigh quarrelled with Charles Lloyd; and for no other reason, I believe, than that the good creature did all he could to make me happy. The truth is, I thought he tried to force my mind from its natural and proper bent; he continually wished me to be from home; he was drawing me *from* the consideration of my poor dear Mary's situation, rather than assisting me to gain a proper view of it with religious consolations. I wanted to be left to the tendency of my own mind in a solitary state which, in times past, I knew had led to quietness and a patient bearing of the yoke. He was hurt that I was not more constantly with him; but he was living with White, a man to whom I had never been accustomed to impart my *dearest feelings*, tho' from long habits of friendliness, and many a social and good quality, I loved him very much. I met company there sometimes—indiscriminate company. Any

society almost, when I am in affliction, is sorely painful to me. I seem to breathe more freely, to think more collectedly, to feel more properly and calmly, when alone. All these things the good creature did with the kindest intentions in the world, but they produced in me nothing but soreness and discontent. I became, as he complained, 'jaundiced' towards him . . . but he has forgiven me—and his smile, I hope, will draw all such humours from me. I am recovering, God be praised for it, a healthiness of mind, something like calmness—but I want more religion—"

Coleridge seems to have suggested that Mary Lamb, for a while at least, and, I assume, after her recovery, should make her home at Nether Stowey, for Lamb says, "Your invitation went to my very heart, but you have a power of exciting interest, of leading all hearts captive, too forcible to admit of Mary's being with you. I consider her as perpetually on the brink of madness. I think you would almost make her dance within an inch of the precipice: she must be with duller fancies and cooler intellects. I know a young man of this description, who has suited her these twenty years, and may live to do so still, if we are one day restored to each other."

It was at this time that "The Old Familiar Faces" was written, the poem by which Lamb is perhaps best known. In their original form the verses ran thus:—

THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES

Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?
I had a mother, but she died, and left me,
Died prematurely in a day of horrors—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a love once, fairest among women.
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man.
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.
Earth seem'd a desert I was bound to traverse,
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother!
Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces.

For some they have died, and some they have left me,
*And some are taken from me;* all are departed;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

When he reprinted the poem in his *Works*, in 1818, Lamb struck out the first stanza. The friend of the fifth stanza is Lloyd; the friend of the seventh is Coleridge; the italicised words in the last stanza refer to Mary Lamb's return to her asylum. Only rarely in his poetry does Lamb attain to a final and universal utterance, but in their tragic tenderness and melancholy these few lines are I think unsurpassed in the language.

We come now to Lamb's only estrangement from his first and closest friend, which culminated in the spring of 1798. The story, in the absence of any letters from Lamb or Lloyd, is not simple, but briefly it may be told thus. Lloyd, as we have seen, was living in London with James White, and Lamb was much with them. Lloyd was busy with his share of *Blank Verse*, most of Lamb's contributions to which we have seen; and Lamb had already set to work upon *Rosamund Gray*, in which Lloyd was deeply interested. These literary exercises were, I imagine, not unassociated with Coleridge's resentment—for it is human to dislike to see a late disciple either displaying independence or passing under another influence; and Coleridge was always curiously human when it came to the point.

But Lloyd added offence to offence. In Mr. Dykes Campbell's words: "In March [1798] there had been talk of a third edition of Coleridge's poems, and on hearing of it Lloyd begged Cottle to 'persuade' Coleridge to omit his. This caused Coleridge to reply, smilingly, that no persuasion was needed for the omission of verses published at the earnest request of the author; and that though circumstances had made the Groscollian motto now

look ridiculous, he accepted the punishment of his folly, closing his letter with the characteristically sententious reflection—'By past experience we build up our moral being.'"

The story may be carried on in the words in which I have previously told it in *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*. What happened after is not clear, but Coleridge seems to have found in Lloyd's behaviour cause for grief so intense that it led him to retire to the "lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton," where, to allay the disturbance of his mind, he had recourse to opium, and where, under its influence, he composed "Kubla Khan." (Coleridge himself assigns an earlier date to the poem, but Mr. Dykes Campbell's chronology is more trustworthy.) The poet continued to brood over the rupture of a friendship that had begun so auspiciously. In the middle of May, when his second child was born, we find him, in writing to Poole concerning an impending bereavement, telling him that he can the better sympathise by reason of sorrows of his own that have "cut more deeply" into his heart "than they ought to have done;" which Mr. Dykes Campbell considered a further allusion to Lloyd's attitude, and to the fact that Lamb was also becoming alienated.

In June, 1798, Cottle, hoping to patch up the disagreement, wrote to Lloyd urging him to visit Coleridge. "I cannot," was Lloyd's reply, "think that I have acted with, or from, passion towards him. Even my solitary night thoughts have been easy and calm when they have dwelt on him. . . . I love Coleridge, and can forget all that has happened. At present I could not well go to Stowey. I could scarcely excuse so sudden a removal from my parents. Lamb quitted me yesterday, after a fortnight's visit. I have been much interested in his society. I never knew him so happy in my life. I shall write to Coleridge to-day."

On Coleridge's side there was, however, more to forgive: there was Lloyd's novel *Edmund Oliver*. This was the young man's crowning offence, for in it he had made use of Coleridge's own experiences as Private Silas Tomkyn Comberbach. "The incidents," said the author in his preface, "relative to the army were given me by an intimate friend, who was himself eye-witness to one of them, and can produce testimony to the truth of the other two." That Coleridge's own story, told to Lloyd

at his fireside, had been drawn upon there can be no doubt. Moreover, the novel contained other passages which Coleridge was quick to apply to himself: Edmund Oliver's love-fits and departure from college tallied with his own experience; the description of him—"His large glistening eye—his dark eyebrows—there was the same bend in the shoulder . . . and the dark hair"—fitted Coleridge too; and this piece of self-revelation in which Oliver elsewhere indulged was painfully applicable to the poet: "I have at all times a strange dreaminess about me, which makes me indifferent to the future, if I can by any means fill the present with sensations. With that dreaminess I have gone on here from day to day; if at any time thought troubled, I have swallowed some spirits, or had recourse to my laudanum." Lloyd's conduct was indefensible, and Coleridge's anger, which was excessive, was not lessened by the circumstance that the novel was dedicated to Lamb.

Where Lamb's sympathies lay we do not know. Probably they were divided, with a bias in favour of Lloyd, since he considered Coleridge to have taken insufficient pains to understand him. Smarting under a sense of injury, possibly tormented by Lloyd's injudicious recollections of privileged personal remarks of Coleridge, Lamb seems to have told Dorothy Wordsworth in a letter that he did not mean to write to Coleridge any more. This being a time when everything that was said was repeated, Coleridge was duly informed (by Lloyd), and straightway wrote a letter containing the following passages: "When I wrote to you that my Sonnet to Simplicity was not composed with reference to Southey, you answered me (I believe these were the words): 'It was a lie too gross for the grossest ignorance to believe;' and I was not angry with you, because the assertion which the grossest ignorance would believe a lie the Omniscient knew to be truth. This, however, makes me cautious not too hastily to affirm the falsehood of an assertion of Lloyd's that in Edmund Oliver's love-fit, leaving college, and going into the army he had no sort of allusion to or recollection of my love-fit, leaving college, and going into the army, and that he never thought of my person in the description of Oliver's person in the first letter of the second volume. This cannot appear stranger to me than my assertion did to you, and therefore I will suspend my absolute faith. . . .

"I have been unfortunate in my connections. Both you and Lloyd became acquainted with me when your minds were far from being in a composed or natural state, and you clothed my image with a suit of notions and feelings which could belong to nothing human. You are restored to comparative saneness, and are merely wondering what is become of the Coleridge with whom you were so passionately in love; *Charles Lloyd's* mind has only changed his disease, and he is now arraying his ci-devant Angel in a flaming San Benito—the whole ground of the garment a dark brimstone and plenty of little devils flourished out in black. Oh, me! Lamb, 'even in laughter the heart is sad!'"

To a large extent Coleridge's attitude was justified, but we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that his rhetoric (as so often in his life) was being used to gloss over former neglect of duty. He had treated neither Lloyd nor Lamb with the loving consideration which he had led them both to believe he cherished for them. He had fostered their reverence for him and yet had avoided the teacher's duties. Under the ordinary conditions of life he had been a good enough friend: but when Lloyd was in a state of perplexity, bordering upon derangement, Coleridge had held out no hand; and not even Lamb's desolate and hopeless state early in 1797 could, as we have seen, move him to write a letter, or in 1798 help to excuse such offence as Coleridge conceived him to have committed. When he deemed himself aggrieved, the Religious Muser could be as self-indulgent in the matter of anger as anybody else. To object is, of course, to set too high an ideal before that frail giant S. T. C. Yet he had taught every one with whom he came in contact to expect so much more from himself than from ordinary mortals, that his defection became peculiarly noticeable and distressing. It was his unhappy destiny always to fail at the last moment.

The final letter in the quarrel was written by Lamb, just before Coleridge's departure for Germany with the Wordsworths in August, 1798. Its inspiration was a remark of Coleridge's, of course repeated to Lamb—"Poor Lamb, if he wants any knowledge, he may apply to me"—a sentence for which, considering what it produced, we must be eternally grateful Lamb hastened to reply to Coleridge with the following series of very pointed personal problems:—

THESES QUÆDAM THEOLOGICÆ

1. Whether God loves a lying Angel better than a true Man?

2. Whether the Archangel Uriel *could* affirm an untruth? and if he *could* whether he *would?*

3. Whether Honesty be an angelic virtue? or not rather to be reckoned among those qualities which the Schoolmen term "*Virtutes minus splendidæ et terræ et hominis particeps*"?

4. Whether the higher order of Seraphim Illuminati ever sneer?

5. Whether pure intelligences can love?

6. Whether the Seraphim Ardentes do not manifest their virtues by the way of vision and theory? and whether practice be not a sub-celestial and merely human virtue?

7. Whether the Vision Beatific be anything more or less than a perpetual representment to each individual Angel of his own present attainments and future capabilities, somehow in the manner of mortal looking-glasses, reflecting a perpetual complacency and self-satisfaction?

8 and last. Whether an immortal and amenable soul may not come to be damned at last, and the man never suspect it beforehand?

*Learned Sir, my Friend,*

Presuming on our long habits of friendship and emboldened further by your late liberal permission to avail myself of your correspondence, in case I want any knowledge, (which I intend to do when I have no Encyclopædia or Lady's Magazine at hand to refer to in any matter of science,) I now submit to your enquiries the above Theological Propositions, to be by you defended, or oppugned, or both, in the Schools of Germany, whither I am told you are departing, to the utter dissatisfaction of your native Devonshire and regret of universal England; but to my own individual consolation if thro the channel of your wished return, Learned Sir, my Friend, may be transmitted to this our Island, from those famous Theological Wits of Leipsic and Gottingen, any rays of illumination, in vain to be derived from the home growth of our English Halls and Colleges. Finally, wishing Learned Sir, that you may see Schiller and swing in a wood (*vide* Poems) and sit upon a Tun, and eat fat hams of Westphalia,

I remain, your friend and docile Pupil to instruct

CHARLES LAMB.

With this letter Coleridge drops out of the correspondence until 1800. It was the only difference that Lamb and he ever had, and it was never absolutely forgotten. Although the quarrel was made up, the two men were never quite on their old terms. Coleridge, to Lamb, was no longer an archangel, but an "archangel a little damaged." Lamb did not love him less, but knew him better.

Lamb rarely alluded to the matter in after years. In a letter to Coleridge in 1820, he said of Lloyd: "He almost alienated you also from me, or me from you, I don't know which; but that breach is closed." (In the same letter Lamb charged Lloyd with the complete alienation of one regretted friend, but does not say who, nor can he now be identified.) And again, in the dedication of Lamb's *Works* to Coleridge, in 1818, we have this: "My friend Lloyd and myself came into our first battle (authorship is a sort of warfare) under cover of the greater Ajax. How this association, which shall always be a dear and proud recollection to me, came to be broken,—who snapped the threefold cord,—whether yourself (but I know that was not the case) grew ashamed of your former companions,—or whether (which is by much the more probable) some ungracious bookseller was author of the separation,—I cannot tell."

But let us forget this unhappy business. Let us rather remember that in a little note on the death of Coleridge Lamb wrote, "He was my fifty-year old friend without a dissension;" and that earlier in the same year, 1834, Coleridge had written in pencil in his *Poetical Works*, against the poem, "This Lime-tree Bower My Prison" (written in 1797): "*Ch. and Mary Lamb—dear to my heart, yea, as it were, my heart. S. T. C. Aet.* 63, 1834. 1797-1834 = 37 *years!*"

And here we practically take leave of Charles Lloyd, whom also Lamb was getting to know better. We shall catch glimpses of him from time to time, but when he left London in the spring or summer of 1798, he passed out of Lamb's life, and Coleridge's, for ever. Two unimportant notes from Lamb to Lloyd are all that remain of what must have been a large correspondence; but the bulk of it was probably, almost certainly, anterior to the summer of 1798. Lloyd's later years were chequered by disease and melancholy, from which he emerged now and then into literary activity. In 1821, during a longer interval than usual, he

published *Desultory Thoughts in London*, which contains some interesting stanzas describing his two old friends and poetical associates. Of Coleridge he wrote:—

One near thee, London, dwells, to whom I fain
  Tribute would pay, or ere this lay I close;
Yet how can I—ungifted with a strain
  Fit to arrest the ear of him who knows
To build such verse as Seraphim might deign
  To listen to, nor break the deep repose
Of those immortal ardours that inspire
Spirit of the inextinguishable fire—

How shall I fitly speak on such a theme?
  He is a treasure by the world neglected,
Because he hath not, with a prescience dim,
  Like those whose every aim is self-reflected,
Pil'd up some fastuous trophy, that of him
  Might tell, what mighty powers the age rejected,
But taught his lips the office of a *pen*—
By fools he's deem'd a being lost to men. . . .

No! Those who most have seen me, since the hour
  When thou and I, in former happier days,
Frank converse held, though many an adverse power
  Have sought the memory of those times to raze,
Can vouch that more it stirs me (thus a tower,
  Sole remnant of vast castle, still betrays
Haply its former splendour) to have prov'd
Thy love, than by fresh friends to have been lov'd.

I have had comrades both for weal and *woe*;
  I have had compeers both for good and *ill*;
But thou'rt the only one I e'er did know
  Who sufferedst such a breeze life's sails to fill,
That all the *scath* I from the *last* did know,
  Thou metamorphosedst, with wizard's skill,
Into a course more blithe, though not less sure:
And *Wisdom's* smile, in *thee*, had folly's lure.

And of Lamb:—

Oft when steals on the meditative hour,
  And parlour twilight to repose invites;
Oft when Imagination's stirring power
  Keeps watch with hollow blasts of winter nights;
Thy countenance bright upon his heart doth shower,
  By Memory trac'd, the exquisite delights,
Which from thy smile, and from thy every tone,
And intercourse ennobling, he has known.

EW MORALITY ;— or — The promis'd Installment of the High-Priest of the Th

MA Sovereign Priest —
ists worship — at whose nod
e Men without a God!
astonish'd Isle
f subjugated Nile.
victor Fleet protect
thropic Sect —

The Sect of MARAT, MIRABEAU, VOLTAIRE, ...
Led by their Pontiff, - good LA-REVEILLERE, ...
Rejoic'd our CLUBS shall greet him, and Install —
The holy Hunch-back in thy Dome, St. PAUL, —
While countless votaries thronging in his train
Wave their Red Caps, and hymn this jocund strain:
"Couriers and Stars, Sedition's Evening Host,
"Thou Morning Chronicle, and Morning Post,

"Whether ye make the Rights of Man
"Your Country libel, and your G
"Or dirt on private worth and vi
"Still blasphemous and blackguard
— "And ye five other wandering Ba
"In sweet accord of harmony and
"C — DGE and S — TH — Y, L — D and
"Tune all your mystic harps to pra

blished August 1st 1798. by J. Wright. No 69. Piccadilly. for the Anti-Jacobin Magazine & Review

## ILANTHROPES, with the Homage of Leviathan and his Suite.

'PR—TL—Y and W—F—LD, humble, holy men,
'Give praises to his name with tongue and pen.'—
'TH—LW—L, and ye that Lecture as ye go—
'And for your pains get Pelted, praise LE PAUX.'—
'Praise him, each Jacobin, or Fool, or Knave,
'And your croppd heads in sign of worship wave!—
'All creeping creatures, venomous and low,
'PAINE, W—LL—MS, G—DW—N, H—LC—FT, praise LEPAUX!—

'And thou LEVIATHAN! on Ocean's brim
'Hugest of living things that sleep & swim;
'Thou in whose nose by BURKE'S gigantic
'The hook was fixed to drag thee to the land
'With ——, ——, and —— in thy train
'And W—— wallowing in the Yeasty ma
'Still as ye sport, and puff, and spout, an
'In puffing, and in spouting, praise LEPAU

Nor can he not indulgé in mentioning
Some high peculiar gifts bestow'd on thee;
So rarely found united, that they bring
To common systems of Humanity
Full refutation: thou canst plume thy wing
To all the holiest heights of poesy;
And more than any other art thou fraught
With accuracy of analytic thought!

It is a dainty banquet, known to few,
To thy mind's inner shrine to have access;
While choicest stores of intellect endue
That Sanctuary, in marvellous excess.
Their lambent glories, ever bright and new,
Those, privileged to be its inmates, bless!
Such as by gods, in tributary rite,
Were hail'd from earth, e'en on their thrones of light!—

Before, however, leaving Lloyd and this period of Lamb's life, I must just refer to the publicity which was thrust upon Coleridge and his poetical friends through the medium of the *Anti-Jacobin*. In the last number of that paper, July 9th, 1798, in a satirical poem entitled "The New Morality," Canning wrote (with reference to the Theophilanthropist, Lepaux):—

And ye five other wandering Bards that move
In sweet accord of harmony and love,
C—DGE and S—TH—Y, L—D, and L—BE and Co.
Tune all your mystic harps to praise LEPAUX!

The *Anti-Jacobin* (I quote again from *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*) then disappeared in favour of the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, the first number of which—published on 1st August—was enriched by a coloured cartoon by Gillray, wherein the particular passage of "The New Morality" which described the worship of Lepaux received the emphasis of coloured illustration. In this picture, which is a fair specimen of Gillray's bludgeon-pencil, a crowd of the more prominent English revolutionists press forward to worship Justice, Philanthropy and Sensibility. Chief of them is the Duke of Bedford as Leviathan. Among the others is Colridge (the spelling is Gillray's) in the guise of a donkey, offering a volume of "Dactylics," and Southey, as another donkey, flourishing a volume of "Saphics." In Southey's pocket is a copy of "Joan of Arc." Behind, seated side by side, poring over a manuscript

entitled "Blank Verse, by Toad and Frog," are a toad and frog. These are marked in the key plan Lloyd and Lamb. No attempt at portraiture of any of the four was made by the artist, as the reproduction of the plate will show.

Coleridge and Southey may have been fair game for the satirist, but Lamb and Lloyd certainly were not. Coleridge and Southey had collaborated in "The Fall of Robespierre" (1794). Coleridge also had lectured at Bristol in 1795 on political questions, and had criticised Pitt with some severity; and these lectures, on being published under the titles "Conciones ad Populum" and "The Plot Discovered," had an addition by Southey. Coleridge also was a contributor to the *Morning Post*, and the friend of Citizen Thelwall, who, when he visited Stowey, was watched by a spy sent thither for the purpose by the Government. But Lamb and Lloyd's printed utterances were as far removed from Jacobinism as from bimetallism.

The Anti-Jacobins did not stop there. When placing Lloyd's luckless novel *Edmund Oliver* in the pillory they contrived to make Lamb share the punishment. Thus: "This Mr. Charles Lloyd we conceive to be one of the twin-bards who unite their impotent efforts to propagate their principles, which are alike marked by folly and by wickedness, in a kind of baby language which they are pleased to term *blank-verse*."

Subsequently, in a piece entitled "The Anarchists: an Ode" —an imitation of Collins's "Ode to the Passions"—which also appeared in the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, the luckless quartette were again castigated. Thus (the mighty dam being Anarchy):—

> See! faithful to their mighty dam,
> C . . . . . DGE, S . . TH . Y, L . . . D , and L . . BE,
> In splay-foot madrigals of love,
> Soft moaning like the widow'd dove,
> Pour, side by side, their sympathetic notes;
> Of equal rights, and civic feasts,
> And tyrant Kings, and knavish priests,
> Swift through the land the tuneful mischief floats.
> And now to softer strains they struck the lyre,
> They sung the beetle, or the mole,
> The dying kid, or ass's foal,
> By cruel man permitted to expire.

And there the *Anti-Jacobin* attack ended.

Eleven years later, however, another satirist, the young and spirited author of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 1809, again grouped them. This time not Lepaux, but Wordsworth, was the alleged object of their adoration: Wordsworth,

> Whose verse, of all but childish prattle void,
> Seems blessed harmony to Lamb and Lloyd.

His Lordship added in an explanatory footnote that "Messrs. Lamb and Lloyd" were "the most ignoble followers of Southey and Co."

Lloyd took the *Anti-Jacobin* attack with his customary seriousness, going so far as to indite a "Letter to *The Anti-Jacobin* Reviewers," which was printed in Birmingham in 1799. Therein he defended Lamb with some vigour: "The person you have thus leagued in a partnership of infamy with me is Mr. Charles Lamb, a man who, so far from being a democrat, would be the first person to assent to the opinions contained in the foregoing pages: he is a man too much occupied with real and painful duties—duties of high personal self-denial—to trouble himself about speculative matters."

Lamb made no public protest, but he did not forget his satirists. In 1802 he contributed to the *Morning Post* this epigram on Canning and Frere:—

> At Eton School brought up with dull boys,
> We shone like *men* among the *school-boys;*
> But since we in the world have been,
> We are but *school-boys* among *men;*

and Canning also came in for some very hard hitting in Lamb's epigrams in the *Champion* many years later.

## CHAPTER XIII

### 1798 (*concluded*)

*Rosamund Gray*—Robert Lloyd—Correspondence with Southey—First Tidings of *John Woodvil*—Enter G. D. and fun.

ALTHOUGH there is extant no letter of Lamb's between January, 1798, and the summer of that year, we know something of his movements. We know him to have spent a fortnight very happily at Birmingham, probably at Lloyd's home, Bingley Hall, where he met others of the family: Charles Lloyd the elder, in whose translations from Homer and Horace he was afterwards to take an interest; Priscilla, who was to marry Christopher Wordsworth, the poet's brother; and possibly Robert, whom he had already seen in London and to whom he was destined to act as mentor and friend. Robert Lloyd, to whom we shall return later in the year, was at this time nineteen, apprenticed to a Quaker grocer and draper at Saffron Walden.

Much of the interval between January and the summer of 1798 Lamb spent in writing *Rosamund Gray*, which was published in the summer of 1798 by Lee & Hurst, under the title *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret*, by Charles Lamb. As in almost everything that he wrote, early or late, the autobiographical character is strong, but it needs careful disentangling, particularly as at one time he narrates his own troubles in the person of Elinor Clare. We see him also as Allan Clare. Old Mrs. Field, Mary Lamb and Coleridge are probably in the story too, the scene of which is laid at Widford. When we remember Mary Lamb's condition at the time, it is impossible not to see Lamb's own feelings in the following extract from a letter from Elinor to Maria Beaumont:—

"Something will still be whispering to me, that I shall one day be inmate of the same dwelling with my cousin, partaker with her in all the delights, which

spring from mutual good offices, kind words, attentions in sickness and in health, —conversation, sometimes innocently trivial, and at others profitably serious ;— books read and commented on, together ; meals ate, and walks taken, together, —and conferences, how we may best do good to this poor person or that, and wean our spirits from the world's *cares*, without divesting ourselves of its *charities*. What a picture I have drawn, Maria!—and none of all these things may ever come to pass."

Again, in the passage describing Elinor's father, we may, I fancy, see John Lamb in his later days, after Samuel Salt's death :—

"The gloom that beset his mind, at times betrayed him into scepticism—he has doubted if there be a Providence ! I have heard him say, 'God has built a brave world, but methinks he has left his creatures to bustle in it *how they may*.'

"At such times he could not endure to hear my mother talk in a religious strain. He would say, 'Woman, have done—you confound, you perplex me, when you talk of these matters, and for one day at least unfit me for the business of life.'

"I have seen her look at him—O God, Maria ! such a *look !* it plainly spake that she was willing to have shared her precious hope with the partner of her earthly cares—but she found a repulse—

"Deprived of such a wife, think you, the old man could have long endured his existence ? or what consolation would his wretched daughter have had to offer him, but silent and imbecile tears ? "

The story in itself is not quite convincing ; but its quality is of the rarest. The early chapters have an extraordinary charm of simplicity ; the later, a curious and painful intensity of feeling that cannot be dissociated in the reader's mind from the sense of a passionate personal grievance. As we read we are persuaded of the reality of Matravis—not so much that he ruined Rosamund, as that he existed fatefully and filled Lamb's mind. In the external form, and indeed in the tone of certain of the letters, there is little doubt but that Lamb was influenced by Mackenzie's gloomy epistolary novel, *Julie de Roubigné ;* but he borrowed no essentials. The circumstance that copies of *Rosamund Gray* are in existence bearing the imprint of Pearson of Birmingham leads to the supposition that it was during his visit to the Lloyds that either Lamb himself or Lloyd interested that bookseller in the book. I do not wish to exaggerate the merit of the story : had Lamb not written *Elia* probably *Rosamund Gray* would never have been reprinted in our own day ; but it has, I think, remarkable qualities and a very distinct and interesting strain of uncanniness.

We find in the summer of 1798 two or three letters from

Lamb to Robert Lloyd, containing a maturity of counsel far beyond Lamb's age of twenty-three. Robert Lloyd seems to have been growing very restless under his employment, and also shaken in his faith. Perhaps Charles Lloyd was not free from blame in this matter, for when Robert was no more than sixteen, and should have been reading Smollett, that disturber of relationships had thus addressed him: "Do not give way to useless speculation. I advise you particularly to read Rousseau's 'Emilius,' in French if you can, and pray, out of regard to *Charles*, who now *earnestly entreats*, pay particular attention to the Savoyard vicar's confessions of faith, in the 2nd or 3rd vol. Get that book at all events. Do not attend to the intricacies of sectarian peculiarities; be a good man, retain a pure heart, but oh! avoid alike the Quaker and the Libertine, the Methodist and the Atheist."

In one of Lamb's letters of counsel to Robert Lloyd are some cautious remarks upon friendship which would not have been similarly worded, we may feel confident, had they been written before the break with Coleridge. There is almost an echo of Coleridge's letter which I have quoted in the previous chapter in these sentences: "I know you have chosen to take up an high opinion of my moral worth. But I say it before God, and I do not lie, you are mistaken in me. I could not bear to lay open all my failings to you, for the sentiment of shame would be too pungent. Let this be an example to you." Henceforward confidences formed no part of Lamb's friendships. His heart kept its own counsel. With the exception of his sister (and Miss Kelly) there is no record of any of his later friends penetrating much beyond his intellect.

Robert Lloyd was too young and too dependent to take Coleridge's place as a correspondent; and Charles Lloyd had disqualified himself. Into the breach stepped Southey, with whom Lamb carried on a steady literary correspondence at the end of 1798 and in the following year. At that time Southey was living at Burton, in Hampshire, busy with the *Annual Anthology* for Cottle, and writing his "English Eclogues" and other poems. He could not of course fill Coleridge's place, but he served as an intellectual stimulus to Lamb, leading him to the exercise of finer critical powers and to wider reading. The first letter of the series—dated July 28th—supplies Southey

with a copy of the Theses; the next discusses Wither and Quarles; the third commends Marlowe and gives signs that Lamb's best judgment is ripening. On November 8th Lamb puts Southey right as to the *Lyrical Ballads*, which had just been published by Cottle. "If you wrote that review in 'Crit. Rev.,' I am sorry you are so sparing of praise to the 'Ancient Marinere;'—so far from calling it, as you do, with some wit, but more severity, 'A Dutch Attempt,' &c., I call it a right English attempt, and a successful one, to dethrone German sublimity. You have selected a passage fertile in unmeaning miracles, but have passed by fifty passages as miraculous as the miracles they celebrate. I never so deeply felt the pathetic as in that part,

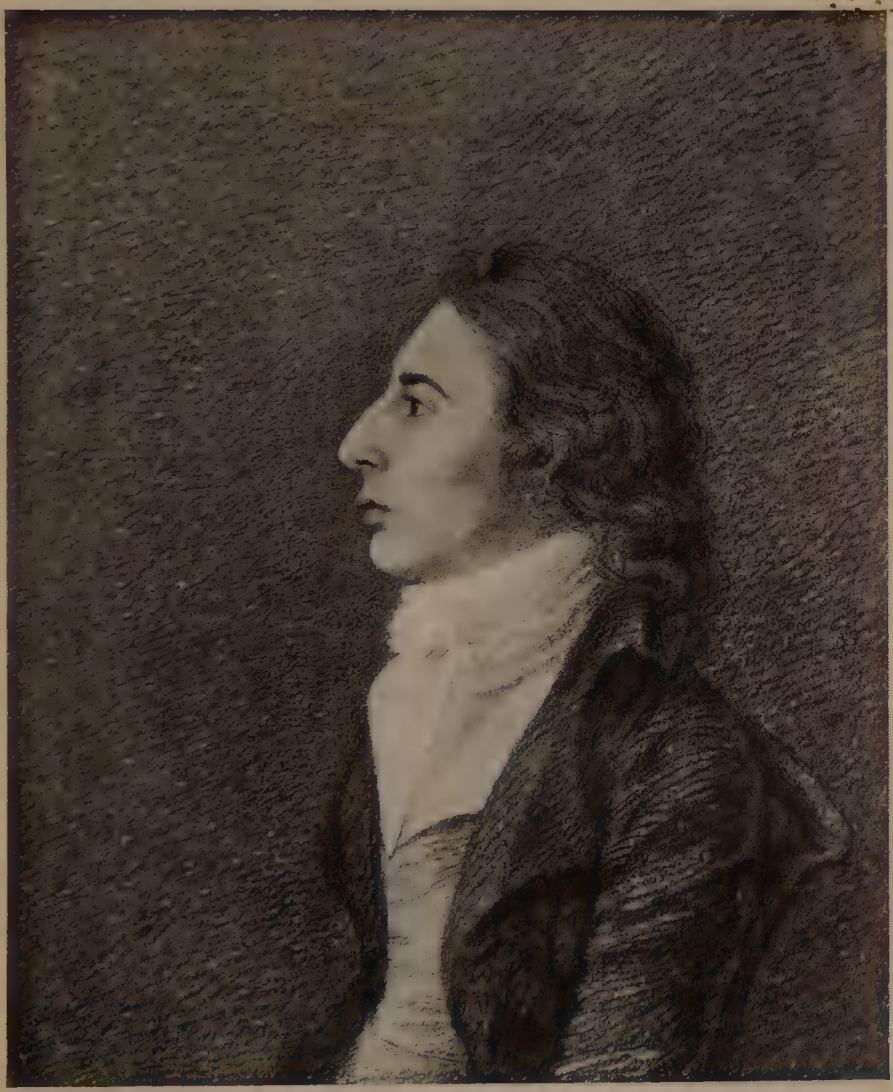
> 'A spring of love gush'd from my heart,
> And I bless'd them unaware—'

It stung me into high pleasure through sufferings. Lloyd does not like it; his head is too metaphysical, and your taste too correct; at least I must allege something against you both, to excuse my own dotage—

> 'So lonely 'twas, that God himself
> Scarce seemèd there to be!'—&c., &c.

But you allow some elaborate beauties—you should have extracted 'em. 'The Ancient Marinere' plays more tricks with the mind than that last poem ['Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey'], which is yet one of the finest written."

We have our first sight of *John Woodvil* (or "Pride's Cure" as it was then called) in the extract from its original form sent by Lamb both to Southey and to Robert Lloyd in November, 1798. In the same month he tells Southey: "My Tragedy will be a medley (as [? and] I intend it to be a medley) of laughter and tears, prose and verse, and in some places rhyme, songs, wit, pathos, humour, and, if possible, sublimity; at least, it is not a fault in my intention, if it does not comprehend most of these discordant colours. Heaven send they dance not the 'Dance of Death!'" Lamb adds, "I hear that the Two Noble Englishmen have parted no sooner than they set foot on German earth, but I have not heard the reason—possibly, to give novelists an handle to exclaim, 'Ah me! what things are perfect?'" The reference is to Wordsworth and Coleridge, who had gone to



ROBERT SOUTHEY IN 1798

FROM THE DRAWING BY HANCOCK IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Germany together, with Dorothy Wordsworth; but it is now considered very unlikely that the separation was due to any quarrel or misunderstanding.

The same letter, the last of any consequence in 1798, contains another reference to George Dyer. "I showed my 'Witch' and 'Dying Lover' [from *John Woodvil*] to Dyer last night; but George could not comprehend how that could be poetry which did not go upon ten feet. . . . George writes odes where the rhymes, like fashionable man and wife, keep a comfortable distance of six or eight lines apart, and calls that 'observing the laws of verse.' George tells you, before he recites, that you must listen with great attention, or you'll miss the rhymes. I did so, and found them pretty exact."

Now that Lloyd had left London and Coleridge was in Germany, James White and George Dyer must have been Lamb's principal friends. It is time to see what manner of man Dyer was.

## CHAPTER XIV

### GEORGE DYER

LAMB conferred the patent of immortality on many of his friends; certainly on G. D. But for certain letters, and the two *Elia* essays "Oxford in the Vacation" and "Amicus Redivivus," George Dyer's name would now be unknown. As it is, we know more of him than of many of our living acquaintance.

The suggestion that Lamb and Dyer were at Christ's Hospital together is an error, for Dyer was twenty-seven when Lamb first entered its gates. He was born in 1755, the son of a watchman at Wapping, and his nomination for the Blue Coat School was obtained through some kindly ladies. There he remained from the age of seven to nineteen. Anthony Askew (1722-1772), classical scholar, and physician to Christ's Hospital, was interested in the boy, lent him books, and encouraged his Greek studies. Dyer, becoming a Grecian, left Christ's Hospital in 1774, two years after Askew's death, and passed to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he was a favourite with the master, the eccentric Richard Farmer, the friend of Askew, Parr and Dr. Johnson. It was while Dyer was at Cambridge that Farmer, then Vice-Chancellor, desiring the seal of the University from a member of the *Caput* who disapproved of a projected address to the King in support of the American policy of the Government, broke open his door with a sledge-hammer. Farmer loved above all things these three: old port, old books and old clothes; and in the second and third of his preferences, especially the third, his taste was followed loyally by his pupil. Dyer subsequently wrote the memoir of Farmer, as of many another man, for the *Annual Necrology*.

On taking his degree in 1778 Dyer became an usher in a

school at Dedham, that to which Lamb mistakingly refers in the first version of the essay "Oxford in the Vacation," in a passage afterwards suppressed: "D. commenced life, after a course of hard study in the 'House of pure Emanuel,' as usher to a knavish fanatic schoolmaster at ——, at a salary of eight pounds per annum, with board and lodging. Of this poor stipend, he never received above half in all the laborious years he served this man. He tells a pleasant anecdote, that when poverty, staring out at his ragged knees, has sometimes compelled him, against the modesty of his nature, to hint at arrears, Dr. —— would take no immediate notice, but, after supper, when the school was called together to even-song, he would never fail to introduce some instructive homily against riches, and the corruption of the heart occasioned through the desire of them—ending with 'Lord, keep thy servants, above all things, from the heinous sin of avarice. Having food and raiment, let us therewithal be content. Give me Agar's wish,'[1]—and the like;—which to the little auditory, sounded like a doctrine full of Christian prudence and simplicity,—but to poor D. was a receipt in full for that quarter's demand at least."

In the following simple and dignified and wholly admirable letter, in which Dyer went into the matter very fully, Lamb's pleasant story is denied. I take it from the memoir of Dyer in the thirty-eighth volume of the *Mirror of Literature*. It was written to Mr. William King in 1820:—

"DEAR SIR,—I return you the tenth Number of 'The London Magazine,' which but for your kindness, might not, perhaps, have fallen in my way. What Elia says relating to G. D., of Clifford's Inn, is very funny, and betrays no unkind intentions, and G. D. himself would have laughed at the humour, and must have blushed at the compliments, had he not been suddenly surprised at some remarks which made him both serious and sad.

"Elia, speaking of G. D.'s leaving the 'House of pure Emmanuel,' alluding, evidently, to a verse of a well-known old English ballad, beginning—

> 'In the House of pure Emmanuel,
> I had my education,'

says, '*he* commenced life as usher to a knavish fanatic schoolmaster at ——, at a salary of five pounds a year, and that of this poor stipend he never received above half, in all the laborious years he served this man ——.' He tells a

[1] Should be Agur's wish. Proverbs xxx. 8, "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me."

pleasant anecdote 'when poverty,' &c., compelled him to hint at arrears,' Dr. —— took a certain course towards G. D., 'which was a receipt in full for that quarter's demand at least.' In answer to this, the gentlemen with whom G. D. was connected at schools are now deceased, but as there are others still living, who know under what circumstances these connexions were formed, they must consider the statement as illiberal and unjust. G. D. sends you the following counter-statement, every word of which you may be assured is strictly true.

"G. D. commenced life as usher to Dr. Grimwood, who kept a respectable academy at Dedham, in the county of Essex, where many of the principal gentry of the county were, and are still, educated, and many of the scholars of that academy have received the first honours at the universities. Dr. G. had been fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and the upper usher was, at the time, fellow of Sydney College, Cambridge; this latter place being pre-occupied, that of under usher fell, of course, to the lot of G. D., but had he continued, it is probable he would have succeeded to the upper usher's place; be that, however, as it may, his salary was so far from being what Elia describes it, that out of it he was enabled to give 20*l.* per annum to a most worthy person (his father), declining in years, who had every claim on his duty and affection. So far from Dr. Grimwood being in arrears during Dyer's stay with him, (which was only a twelvemonth,) he thinks that he received his full salary before it was due. It was a point of honour that led to his determination to leave; and when he did leave, (after a proposal from Dr. Grimwood to increase his salary if he would continue,) it was with much concern and affection on both sides; and the above gentleman made G. D. a present of five guineas over and above his salary. It was at this school that G. D. (to borrow Elia's expression) 'commenced life;' afterwards he became the inmate of the Rev. Dr. Ryland, who kept an academy at Northampton, on much lower terms, and consequently his ushers' salaries could not be very high; but D. was not properly in the full character of an usher here. All the said places were occupied; he was here a sort of supernumerary; it suited his convenience at the time to be there, and on the part of the Rev. Mr. R. it was an accommodation to the peculiar circumstances of G. D., who, if he did not in all things agree with this gentleman, found the situation very favourable to his own *prevailing pursuits*. It is true, he continued here much longer than it was at first intended by him, or than was expected by his part employer; but G. D. is not aware that he made any regular agreements on the score of salary, and indeed, for the *reasons* just alluded to, none such could have been made. It is true that D. might have looked for some remuneration, but the Rev. Mr. Ryland knew on what circumstances, and for what purposes, he came to him from the first; he knew that it had answered those purposes; he knew that he had studied that it should do so; he knew that he had pointed out to him his resources, and if G. D. had not availed himself of those resources so much as this good gentleman thought he did, that was certainly his own fault. Further, Mr. Ryland knew that G. D. had very kind and liberal friends. G. D. considers himself to this day as under great obligations to this gentleman, and whatever he may at any time have received from him was to be considered more as a gratuity than a salary. To speak the truth, D. was in this latter situation rather in the character of a student than an usher.

"The Rev. Mr. Ryland's terms for tuition were not only low, but his hand was apt to be liberal beyond his means; his peculiar situation as a very popular preacher in a particular line, rendered his academy a sort of open house 'to all

the vagrant train.' As to his ushers, they were commonly persons who had come to him under some peculiar difficulties, on whose gratitude he had even a claim; and if his own circumstances, for the reasons mentioned, did not allow him to give large salaries, it was understood they had enjoyed advantages under him, which were a full compensation for their services, so that some such prayer as 'Elia,' *in his humorous way, alludes to, if even such had come from him, might have had in it something more just and good than Elia is aware of.*

"The Rev. Dr. Ryland was a gentleman of very extensive reading, eccentric, certainly, if ever man was, both as a reader, an author, and a man; but his understanding possessed some strong features of character; his imagination would sometimes take no common flights; and some of his publications bear evidently these marks of his eccentricities; and with the singular boldness of his remarks, every one who was acquainted with him was well aware; and it is not improbable that even G. D. may, in some unguarded moment, have made a slight allusion to them; and this, perhaps, Elia may have worked up in his farcical, poetical narrative. But you perceive, Sir, in reference to Dr. Grimwood, where he says D. 'commenced life,' not a word can be true. As to Dr. Ryland, D. recollects a circumstance which he will here mention: A certain spark was once making himself merry with some of his peculiar sayings, when he was interrupted by the Rev. Robert Robinson, (whose life I have published,) and who was himself a truly great man; 'Sir, let me tell you, if you take away eleven parts out of twelve from Dr. Ryland, there will still be left a greater man than yourself.' This, however, is not here mentioned as being applicable to Elia; by no means. Elia is unquestionably a great wit, and may be a great man; but he is certainly a very different man from the spark alluded to. There are some other remarks in the witty Elia's communication to the 'London Magazine,' relative to G. D., (without *malice prepense* on his part,) calculated to do mischief. Elia describes 'G. D.' as under-working for himself, 'drudging at low rates.' Is this said out of mere fun, or to excite pity towards poor 'D.'? If the latter, he should know that pity is often a poor consoler, and very frequently a bad friend. As he comically describes himself 'a votary of the desk, a notched, and cropt scrivener,' or, as he most probably is, a brother of the quill, in another sense, even what is called an author, he should know that under-workers are not considered by brother workmen as dealing fairly by the craft, and are too likely to be frustrated in their undertakings.

"Excuse the length and tediousness of this letter, and believe me, Dear Sir, yours, most sincerely,

"G. DYER."

Lamb also had something further to say on the subject some years later. Writing to Dyer in 1831 he says: "You never penned a line which for its own sake you need (dying) wish to blot. You mistake your heart if you think you *can* write a lampoon. Your whips are rods of roses. Your spleen has ever had for its objects vices, not the vicious—abstract offences, not the concrete sinner. But you are sensitive, and wince as much at the consciousness of having committed a compliment, as another

man would at the perpetration of an affront. But do not lug me into the same soreness of conscience with yourself. I maintain, and will to the last hour, that I never writ of you but *con amore*. That if any allusion was made to your near-sightedness, it was not for the purpose of mocking an infirmity, but of connecting it with scholar-like habits: for is it not erudite and scholarly to be somewhat near of sight, before age naturally brings on the malady? You could not then plead the *obrepens senectus*. Did I not moreover make it an apology for a certain *absence*, which some of your friends may have experienced, when you have not on a sudden made recognition of them in a casual street-meeting, and did I not strengthen your excuse for this slowness of recognition, by further accounting morally for the present engagement of your mind in worthy objects? Did I not, in your person, make the handsomest apology for absent-of-mind people that was ever made? If these things be not so, I never knew what I wrote or meant by my writing, and have been penning libels all my life without being aware of it."

Leaving Dedham, Dyer entered the family of Robert Robinson of Cambridge, the Baptist minister (who afterwards turned to Unitarianism). That valiant Dissenter was then living at Chesterton with his numerous children, to whom G. D. was to act as tutor. At that time Dyer was fully intending to take orders, as all Grecians were expected to, but under Robinson's influence he too became a Unitarian and gave up his ecclesiastical projects. Robinson, a sensible and humorous man of strong individuality, died in 1790, leaving Dyer to edit his *History of Baptism* and his *Ecclesiastical Researches*, and then to write his life in 1796—a book which Wordsworth called one of the best biographies in the language. This work, which I have read, "discovers" (as Dyer would say) by no means a meek mind in its author, but a decisively opinionated one. Yet it seems to me to be a good book rather because Robinson was a strong and worthy man than because Dyer was an able biographer.

Change of faith having brought his intended career to an end, Dyer returned to teaching after Robinson's death, and it was then that he joined Dr. Ryland in a school at Northampton, where he had for a colleague John Clarke, father of Lamb's friend Charles Cowden Clarke. That was in 1791. While at Northampton, at the age of thirty-six, he knew, perhaps for the

first and last time, romance. Like Calverley's "Gemini," both G. D. and John Clarke loved the same lady, the Rev. Dr. Ryland's stepdaughter. Clarke won her, but the two rivals continued friends; and "many years after," writes Cowden Clarke, "when my father died, George Dyer asked for a private conference with me, told me of his youthful attachment for my mother, and inquired whether her circumstances were comfortable, because in case, as a widow, she had not been left well off he meant to offer her his hand. Hearing that in point of money she had no cause for concern, he begged me to keep secret what he had confided to me, and he himself never made farther allusion to the subject." I think that is one of the prettiest stories I know; and it lends emphasis to Hazlitt's remark of G. D. in his essay in 1821, "On the Look of a Gentleman" (Dyer being the common property of the essayists), that he was one of "God Almighty's gentlemen."

In 1792, making up his mind as to his true vocation, Dyer turned his steps to London, took those rooms in Clifford's Inn, the abode of lawyers, from which he never moved (dwelling, as Lamb said, "like a dove in an asp's nest"), and began his long career as a hack and the friend of letters and men of letters.

Dyer's principal work was scholarly or serious; but he had his lighter moments too, when he wrote verses, some of them quite sprightly, and moved socially from house to house. In the letter to Southey on page 143 we have seen something of George Dyer's attitude to poetry. The subject is continued in a letter to Wordsworth, some years later. "To G. D. a poem is a poem. His own as good as anybody's, and (God bless him!) anybody's as good as his own; for I do not think he has the most distant guess of the possibility of one poem being better than another. The gods, by denying him the very faculty itself of discrimination, have effectually cut off every seed of envy in his bosom. But with envy, they excited curiosity also; and if you wish the copy again, which you destined for him, I think I shall be able to find it again for you, on his third shelf, where he stuffs his presentation copies, uncut. . . ." Lamb adds that he recently gave Dyer his *Works*, and without any scruple rescued the copy after a little while and made it over to John Stoddart.

Dyer's principal verses are to be found in his *Poems*, 1800.

This book originally was to consist of two volumes, one containing poetry and the other criticism; but its author altered and changed his plan, and it was ultimately sent to the printers in one volume with sixty-eight pages of preface. And then occurred a tragedy, for just after the book was ready Dyer suddenly realised that he had committed himself in this preface to a principle in which he did not really believe. Lamb tells the story in a letter to Manning in December, 1800:—

"At length George Dyer's phrenesis has come to a crisis; he is raging and furiously mad. I waited upon the heathen, Thursday was a se'nnight; the first symptom which struck my eye and gave me incontrovertible proof of the fatal truth was a pair of nankeen pantaloons four times too big for him, which the said Heathen did pertinaciously affirm to be new.

"They were absolutely ingrained with the accumulated dirt of ages; but he affirmed them to be clean. He was going to visit a lady that was nice about those things, and that's the reason he wore nankeen that day. And then he danced, and capered, and fidgeted, and pulled up his pantaloons, and hugged his intolerable flannel vestment closer about his poetic loins; anon he gave it loose to the zephyrs which plentifully insinuate their tiny bodies through every crevice, door, window or wainscot, expressly formed for the exclusion of such impertinents. Then he caught at a proof sheet, and catched up a laundress's bill instead—made a dart at Blomfield's Poems, and threw them in agony aside. I could not bring him to one direct reply; he could not maintain his jumping mind in a right line for the tithe of a moment by Clifford's Inn clock. He must go to the printer's immediately — the most unlucky accident — he had struck off five hundred impressions of his Poems, which were ready for delivery to subscribers, and the Preface must all be expunged. There were eighty pages of Preface, and not till that morning had he discovered that in the very first page of said Preface he had set out with a principle of Criticism fundamentally wrong, which vitiated all his following reasoning. The Preface must be expunged, although it cost him £30—the lowest calculation, taking in paper and printing! In vain have his real friends remonstrated against this Midsummer madness. George is as obstinate as a Primitive Christian—and wards and parries off all our thrusts with one unanswerable

fence;—'Sir, it's of great consequence that the *world* is not *misled!*'"

A few months later George Dyer's phrenesis came to a head again. Lamb told the story to Rickman, to whom Dyer had introduced him, in a letter of which, in the part appertaining to Dyer, I cannot bring myself to curtail a syllable. "I wish I could convey to you any notion of the whimsical scenes I have been witness to in this fortnight past. 'Twas on Tuesday week the poor heathen scrambled up to my door about breakfast time. He came thro' a violent rain with no neckcloth on, and a *beard* that made him a spectacle to men and angels, and tap'd at the door. Mary open'd it, and he stood stark still and held a paper in his hand importing that he had been ill with a fever. He either wouldn't or couldn't speak except by signs. When you went to comfort him he put his hand upon his heart, and shook his head, and told us his complaint lay where no medicines could reach it. I was dispatch'd for Dr. Dale, Mr. Phillips of St. Paul's Church yard and Mr. Frend who is to be his executor. George solemnly delivered into Mr. Frend's hands and mine an old burnt preface that had been in the fire, with injunctions, which we solemnly vow'd to obey, that it should be printed after his death with his last corrections, and that some account should be given to the world why he had not fulfill'd his engagement with subscribers. Having done this and borrow'd two guineas of his bookseller (to whom he imparted in confidence that he should leave a great many loose papers behind him which would only want methodizing and arranging to prove very lucrative to any bookseller after his death) he laid himself down on my bed in a mood of complacent resignation.

"By the aid of meat and drink put into him (for I all along suspected a vacuum) he was enabled to sit up in the evening, but he had not got the better of his intolerable fear of dying; he expressed such philosophic indifference in his speech and such frightened apprehensions in his physiognomy that if he had truly been dying and I had known it I could not have kept my countenance. In particular when the doctor came and ordered him to take little white powders (I suppose of chalk or alum to humour him) he ey'd him with a *suspicion* which I could not account for; he has since explain'd that he took it for granted Dr. Dale knew his situation and had ordered him these powders

to hasten his departure that he might suffer as little pain as possible. Think what an aspect the heathen put on with these fears upon a dirty face.

"To recount all his freaks for two or three days while he thought he was going, and how the fit operated, and sometimes the man got uppermost and sometimes the author, and he had this excellent person to serve, and he must correct some proof sheets for Phillips, and he could not bear to leave his subscribers unsatisfy'd, but he must not think of these things now, he was going to a place where he should satisfy all his debts—and when he got a little better he began to discourse what a happy thing it would be if there was a place where all the good men and women in the world might meet, meaning heav'n, and I really believe for a time he had doubts about his soul, for he was very near, if not quite, light-headed. The fact was he had not had a good meal for some days, and his little dirty Neice (whom he sent for with a still dirtier Nephew, and hugg'd him; and bid them farewell) told us that unless he dines out he subsists on tea and gruels. And he corroborated this tale by ever and anon complaining of sensations of gnawing which he felt about his *heart*, which he mistook his stomach to be, and sure enough these gnawings were dissipated after a meal or two, and he surely thinks that he has been rescued from the jaws of death by Dr. Dale's white powders.

"He is got quite well again by nursing, and chirps of odes and lyric poetry the day long—he is to go out of town on Monday, and with him goes the dirty train of his papers and books which follow'd him to our house. I shall not be sorry when he takes his nipt carcase out of my bed, which it has occupied, and vanishes with all his Lyric lumber, but I will endeavour to bring him in future into a method of dining at least once a day. I have proposed to him to dine with me—and he has nearly come into it whenever he does not go out—and pay me. I will take his money beforehand and he shall eat it out. If I don't it will go all over the world. Some worthless relations, of which the dirty little devil that looks after him and a still more dirty nephew are component particles, I have reason to think divide all his gains with some lazy worthless authors that are his constant satellites. The Literary Fund has voted him seasonably £20, and if I can help it he shall spend it on his own carcase.

I have assisted him in arranging the remainder of what he calls Poems. . . .

"What do you think of a life of G. Dyer? I can scarcely conceive a more amusing novel. He has been connected with all sects in the world and he will faithfully tell all he knows. Every body will read it; and if it is not done according to my fancy, I promise to put him in a novel when he dies. Nothing shall escape *me*. If you think it feasible, whenever you write you may encourage him. Since he has been so close with me I have perceiv'd the workings of his inordinate vanity, his gigantic attention to particles and to prevent open vowels in his odes, his solicitude that the public may not lose any tittle of his poems by his death, and all the while his utter ignorance that the world don't care a pin about his odes and his criticisms, a fact which every body knows but himself—he *is a rum genius*."

Lamb's idea of putting Dyer into a novel was not a new one. Writing to Coleridge in 1800 he had said: "George Dyer is the only literary character I am happily acquainted with. The oftener I see him, the more deeply I admire him. He is goodness itself. If I could but calculate the precise date of his death, I would write a novel on purpose to make George the hero. I could hit him off to a hair." If only the novel had been written . . . ! But there could be nothing in it better than the letter to Rickman.

A letter to Rickman on November 24th, 1801, shows that Dyer was conforming to Lamb's plans for him: "Dyer regularly dines with me when he does not go a visiting—and brings his shilling. He has picked up amazingly. I never saw him happier. He has had his doors listed, and his casements puttied, and bought a handsome *screen* of the last century. Only his poems do not get finished. One volume is printing, but the second wants a good deal doing to it. I do not expect he will make much progress with his Life and Opinions till his detestable Lyric Poetry is delivered to subscribers. . . .

"He talks of marrying, but this *en passant* (as he says) and *entre nous*, for God's sake don't mention it to him, for he has not forgiven me for betraying to you his purpose of writing his own Life. He says, that if it once spreads, so many people will expect and wish to have a place in it, that he is sure he shall

disoblige all his friends." Dyer, it seems, did write his autobiography, but the MS. was lost.

The history of Dyer's unfortunate poetical project is, I think, worth telling with some precision. The first notification that I can find is in the *Monthly Magazine* for October, 1796, where this statement occurs:—

"Mr. George Dyer, with whose poetical talents the public are well acquainted, is preparing a course of publications—satires, odes, and elegies; two of which will shortly make their appearance, under the titles of *Poets' Fate* and *Poetic Sympathies*."

That was at the beginning of Lamb's acquaintance with G. D. Two years later, in November, 1798, the same magazine contained this announcement:—

"Mr. Dyer, in consequence of unforeseen engagements, and the advice of his friends, has been obliged to alter the plan of his Poetical Publication:—instead of three volumes at a guinea, two only, consisting of poems and poetical essays, will be published at twelve shillings. The first volume will appear next month."

Further delay occurred. No volumes, either at three for a guinea or two for twelve shillings, made their appearance; instead, in the *Monthly Magazine* for June, 1799, the following letter was printed:—

"G. Dyer presents respects to the subscribers to his poems, and informs them, with great concern, that the publication is delayed till the winter season. All the reasons of this delay could not with propriety be announced here, but shall be fully detailed in the preface to his poems. For the present, he must content himself with saying, that by unforeseen engagements, and by extending his plan beyond his original intention, he cannot get out the first volume, till the greater part of his subscribers will have left town for the summer; a time very inauspicious to publications of this nature. After mature deliberation, therefore, he thinks it most adviseable to print his two volumes at the same time; and his criticisms, extended as they are to an unexpected length, will form a distinct volume, comprehending free remarks on every species of poetry, and illustrations from the mythology of different nations. This arrangement, he apprehends, will less encumber the poems, and be more useful and agreeable to those persons for whose service this volume is intended. Such persons, however, as are not pleased with this arrangement may have their subscription-money returned, if they will have the goodness to apply to the bookseller where any subscription has been paid, or to the author himself, if the money was paid to him. Such other persons as choose to favour this work with their encouragement, are informed, that names are still received by the booksellers announced in his advertisement.

"*Clifford's Inn, May* 20, 1799."

Dyer was now pledged to two volumes of poetry and preface, and we must suppose him actively engaged upon them thenceforward,

for in 1800 the first volume was ready. "Poems by George Dyer" was the simple title. It was the preface to this volume which, when 500 copies were printed, suddenly confronted its author with a fallacy that led to his phrenesis. The half-burnt cancelled preface (Lamb called Dyer "Cancellarius Major"), bound up with the *Poems*, 1801, and other works, from Lamb's shelves, is in the British Museum, where the curious may study it. "Snatch'd out of the fire" is Lamb's comment in the margin. I am entirely at a loss to discover what the fallacy is, for the first page is practically reproduced in its entirety in the revised preface of 1802. Nor does a comparison of the two prefaces otherwise yield any discrepancy amounting (to the best of my belief, but such researches are very difficult to make thoroughly,) to a false principle. The first omitted passage, on the second (not the first) page of the 1800 preface, is this :—

"A sufficient degree of generosity is found in the world to encourage a useful pursuit, and even an attempt to please : the violence of party cannot controul it; nor will it be overrated by the manœuverings of pride, or the feebleness of ignorance."

Can it be this benevolent opinion which poor G. D. discovered to be a fatal error ?

The result at any rate was the suppression of the edition; surely one of those pacific acts of heroism which never receive recognition. Comic as the situation is — the flat, impossible poet declaring that the world must not be misled— it has its nobility, too, and very real pathos.

The luckless preface is very long and very discursive. It examines the nature of lyrical poetry, it analyses the poetic character, it exposes falsehoods told of Dyer by the critics and quidnuncs, it explains Dyer's attitude to his friends. One passage I must quote :—

"With regard to the ladies, whose names are mentioned in this or a former volume, let it be publicly understood, as it has always been privately, that my language has been the expression of simple, though sincere, respect. To a powerful affection, many years indulged, and to a fondness for retirement, I am certainly indebted for a revival of some poetical feelings: when the heart is most subdued, it sometimes loves to worship in silence. These feelings may, perhaps, since have broken out into verse; but while immediately under the influence of that softness, I made no rebuses, and sent about no poetical billets doux; a confession, it is true, not of a very gallant poet: but reasons present themselves for my acknowledging, that, in print, just enough is delivered to secure me from the imputation of insincerity, and no more. The mention of names may, perhaps, by some be considered imprudent; but the moral and

intellectual qualities that entitle one sex to respect or esteem, will, also, justly entitle the other: and where a writer acts not without reasons, and where, by the parties concerned, those reasons are not disapproved, there is no ground for censure."

The volume, without its preface, appeared again in 1801, and again publication was interrupted. At last, in 1802, the waiting world had the work—in two small volumes, with the original preface in much the same form, and the following explanation of the change of shape:—

"It was distantly suggested by friends, well qualified to have spoken with more freedom, that the undertaking to write *three* volumes of poems, and those mostly *lyrical*, would prove at once very arduous, and very unprofitable; and, that I had set myself no easy task, I could not be quite ignorant; well aware as I was, that through the whole range of poetry, no form required such frequent sacrifice to the graces, as what I was then attempting. The extent of the plan, also, was at least equal to the degree of elegance required in the treatment of the subject. In the ardour of my pursuit, the arts and sciences were made to pass in review before me. Statesmen, patriots, and heroes, poets, critics, and private friends, were each to receive some tribute of esteem, or some expressions of respect: and even amid these flights of fancy, critical remarks were intended on every branch of poetic composition. Thus extensive was the plan! So little do we know our weakness!"

Of Dyer's poetry there is little to say. It is just so many sober words in metre. His "Stanzas Meditated in the Cloisters of Christ's Hospital," from which Lamb quotes at the end of his first essay on the school (in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1813), is among his best poems. The farthest swing of his poetical pendulum in the other direction is perhaps the comic pæan, in the sapphic measure, in praise of snuff and tobacco, beginning:—

I've gŏt th' hēad-āche: gīve mĕ thĕn, bōy thĕ snūff-box,
Fīll'd wĭth Hōare's bēst snūff, ă rĕvīvĭng mīxture,
Bēst ŏf āll snūffs: thāt wĭll rĕlīeve mĕ mōre than
Strāsbŭrgh ōr Hārdham's.

Ode VIII. in Book IV. of Dyer's *Poetics*, 1812, has a certain simple charm, but is chiefly interesting as exhibiting its author in nautical attire. I quote two stanzas:—

THE SAILOR

The author expresses grateful feelings to an honest landlady and her daughter, for kind attentions during his short stay with them near Hamilton, in Argyleshire; but pleads against their solicitations for his longer continuance. He wore the dress of a Sailor at this time, and writes under that character.

My dame, you view a sailor brave,
Hastening far hence to plough the seas,
To quit for the rude boisterous wave,

The babbling bourn, the whispering trees:
The mavis calls; the laverocks ring
Their music thro' the heav'ns so clear:
Nature's full chorus seems to sing,
Still, happy loiterer, linger here.
But, dame, you view a sailor brave,
And he must plough the ocean wave. . . .

Your Peggy's eye is dew-drop bright;
Her smiling cheek is lily fair;
Her feet as hare's move soft and light,*
Her voice as blackbird's loud and clear:
Oh! she goes near to wound my heart,
As oft she sings her "*Highland Laddie:*"
So quickly, dame, must I depart,
And keep my heart still tight and steady:
For, dame, you view a sailor brave;
Quick he must plough the ocean wave.

Footnotes were a special weakness of Dyer's. Here is the last stanza, with its additaments, of a poem on "The Triumph of Poetry," in his *Poetics*:—

Oh! might I view again, with ravish'd sight,
As when with candid Anderson [1] I stray'd,
And all the wonder-varying scene survey'd,
Sea, hills, and city fair, from Calton's [2] height;
And hear, (for Scotland's rhimes, ah! soon may fail [3])
Some Ednam bard awake the trembling string; [4]
Some tuneful youth [5] of charming Tiviotdale;
Some Kelso songstress [6] love's dear raptures sing.
Language may fail, but love shall never die,
Till beauty fails to charm, till love forgets to sigh.

[1] Dr. Robert Anderson, Editor of the Works of the British Poets, and author of a valuable Life of Dr. Smollet.

[2] Calton Hill, whence a view, at once romantic and sublime, is taken of the city of Edinburgh, of the Firth of Forth, and the hills of Fifeshire on the opposite coast.

[3] Such, at least, is the opinion of some judicious persons in Scotland.

[4] Ednam is near Kelso, in Berwickshire, near which the little river Eden flows, from which the village takes its name. Ednam is the native place of Thomson, the author of the Seasons.

[5] Alludes to a pedestrian tour made in this pastoral and truly classical country, and in some part of the north of England, with a gentleman of great talents, now eminently distinguished at Calcutta, for his extraordinary skill in the Asiatic languages. See an Essay on the Languages and Literature of the Indo-Chinese Nations, in Vol. X. of the ASIATIC RESEARCHES, by John Leyden, M.D.

[6] The Scotch melodies, sung to the Scotch airs, and by the female voice, constitutes, as must be supposed, one of the charms of this delightful country.

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* It is scarcely necessary to observe here, that an allusion is made to the *barefooted* lasses of Scotland:

"Here view *twa barefoot beauties* clean and clear."

ALLAN RAMSAY'S "GENTLE SHEPHERD."

I wonder which of his poems Dyer read to the other patients at Dr. Graham's earth-bath establishment (as he did when he was being treated there), his audience, like himself, being half-buried in the garden, all around him? What a picture!

Best among Dyer's prose works were his *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson* and his *History of the University and Colleges of Cambridge*. He wrote, moreover, countless articles, reviews and biographies for periodicals, pamphlets on religious questions, and "all that was original" in James Valpy's edition of the classics, in 141 volumes, 1809-1831. He also travelled from library to library collecting materials for a bibliographical work, which was never published. Dyer showed Hazlitt "with some triumph" two fingers of which he had lost the use in copying out manuscripts of Procrus and Plotinus in a fine Greek hand.

Mr. W. C. Hazlitt records that Miss Lamb and Mrs. Hazlitt once made a plan pleasantly to surprise Dyer by mending his arm-chair, which had a hundred holes in it. These they sewed up. Dyer's horror may be imagined when it is recorded that in every one of those gaping wounds he kept a book.

"He hangs," said Hazlitt, of Dyer, "like a film and cobweb upon letters, or like the dust on the outside of knowledge, which should not too rudely be brushed aside." And Lamb summed up his labours in the following words in "Oxford in the Vacation" in 1820: "D. has been under-working for himself ever since;—drudging at low rates for unappreciating booksellers,—wasting his fine erudition in silent corrections of the classics, and in those unostentatious but solid services to learning, which commonly fall to the lot of laborious scholars, who have not the art to sell themselves to the best advantage. . . . If his muse of kindness halt a little behind the strong lines, in fashion in this excitement-craving age, his prose is the best of the sort in the world, and exhibits a faithful transcript of his own healthy natural mind, and cheerful innocent tone of conversation."

The same essay contains Lamb's delightful account of meeting Dyer at Oxford (really at Cambridge), "grown almost into a book" among the books he loved so well. "D. started like an unbroke heifer, when I interrupted him. *A priori* it was not very probable that we should have met in Oriel. But D. would have done the same, had I accosted him on the sudden in his own walks in Clifford's-inn, or in the Temple. In addition to

a provoking short-sightedness (the effect of late studies and watchings at the midnight oil) D. is the most absent of men. He made a call the other morning at our friend *M.'s* [Basil Montagu's] in Bedford Square; and, finding nobody at home, was ushered into the hall, where, asking for pen and ink, with great exactitude of purpose he enters me his name in the book —which ordinarily lies about in such places, to record the failures of the untimely or unfortunate visitor—and takes his leave with many ceremonies, and professions of regret. Some two or three hours after, his walking destinies returned him into the same neighbourhood again, and again the quiet image of the fire-side circle at *M.'s*—Mrs. *M.* presiding at it like a Queen Lar, with pretty *A. S.* [Ann Skepper, afterwards Mrs. B. W. Procter] at her side—striking irresistibly on his fancy, he makes another call (forgetting that they were 'certainly not to return from the country before that day week') and disappointed a second time, inquires for pen and paper as before: again the book is brought, and in the line just above that in which he is about to print his second name (his re-script)—his first name (scarce dry) looks out upon him like another Sosia, or as if a man should suddenly encounter his own duplicate!—The effect may be conceived. D. made many a good resolution against any such lapses in future. I hope he will not keep them too rigorously.

"For with G. D.—to be absent from the body, is sometimes (not to speak it profanely) to be present with the Lord. At the very time when, personally encountering thee, he passes on with no recognition—or, being stopped, starts like a thing surprised—at that moment, reader, he is on Mount Tabor—or Parnassus—or co-sphered with Plato—or, with Harrington, framing 'immortal commonwealths'—devising some plan of amelioration to thy country, or thy species—peradventure meditating some individual kindness or courtesy, to be done to *thee thyself*, the returning consciousness of which made him to start so guiltily at thy obtruded personal presence. . . .

"D. is delightful any where, but he is at the best in such places as these. He cares not much for Bath. He is out of his element at Buxton, at Scarborough, or Harrowgate. The Cam and the Isis are to him 'better than all the waters of Damascus.' On the Muses' hill he is happy, and good, as one of the Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains; and when he

goes about with you to show you the halls and colleges, you think you have with you the Interpreter at the House Beautiful."

It is upon neither his poetry nor his prose but upon this passage and one other in Lamb's essays that George Dyer's title to fame reposes. One other in particular: for the achievement of his life, the deed by which he is known and will be known throughout the ages, is his involuntary dip in the New River in 1823. The story is told in the *Elia* essay "Amicus Redivivus":—

"I do not know when I have experienced a stranger sensation, than on seeing my old friend G. D., who had been paying me a morning visit a few Sundays back, at my cottage at Islington, upon taking leave, instead of turning down the right hand path by which he had entered—with staff in hand, and at noon day, deliberately march right forwards into the midst of the stream that runs by us, and totally disappear.

"A spectacle like this at dusk would have been appalling enough; but, in the broad open daylight, to witness such an unreserved motion towards self-destruction in a valued friend, took from me all power of speculation.

"How I found my feet, I know not. Consciousness was quite gone. Some spirit, not my own, whirled me to the spot. I remember nothing but the silvery apparition of a good white head emerging; nigh which a staff (the hand unseen that wielded it) pointed upwards, as feeling for the skies. In a moment (if time was in that time) he was on my shoulders, and I—freighted with a load more precious than his who bore Anchises. . . .

"It was pleasant to observe the effect of the subsiding alarm upon the nerves of the dear absentee. It seemed to have given a shake to memory, calling up notice after notice, of all the providential deliverances he had experienced in the course of his long and innocent life. Sitting up in my couch—my couch which, naked and void of furniture hitherto, for the salutary repose which it administered, shall be honoured with costly valance, at some price, and henceforth be a state-bed at Colebrook,—he discoursed of marvellous escapes—by carelessness of nurses—by pails of gelid, and kettles of the boiling element, in infancy—by orchard pranks, and snapping twigs, in schoolboy frolics—by descent of tiles at Trumpington, and of heavier tomes at Pembroke—by studious watchings, inducing frightful vigilance—by want, and the fear of want, and all the sore

throbbings of the learned head.—Anon, he would burst out into little fragments of chaunting—of songs long ago—ends of deliverance-hymns, not remembered before since childhood, but coming up now, when his heart was made tender as a child's—for the *tremor cordis*, in the retrospect of a recent deliverance, as in a case of impending danger, acting upon an innocent heart, will produce a self-tenderness, which we should do ill to christen cowardice; and Shakspeare, in the latter crisis, has made his good Sir Hugh to remember the sitting by Babylon, and to mutter of shallow rivers. . . .

"Had he been drowned in Cam there would have been some consonancy in it; but what willows had ye to wave and rustle over his moist sepulture?—or, having no *name*, besides that unmeaning assumption of *eternal novity*, did ye think to get one by the noble prize, and henceforth to be termed the STREAM DYERIAN?

> And could such spacious virtue find a grave
> Beneath the imposthumed bubble of a wave?

"I protest, George, you shall not venture out again—no, not by daylight—without a sufficient pair of spectacles—in your musing moods especially. Your absence of mind we have borne, till your presence of body came to be called in question by it. You shall not go wandering into Euripus with Aristotle, if we can help it. Fie, man, to turn dipper at your years, after your many tracts in favour of sprinkling only!

"I have nothing but water in my head o' nights since this frightful accident. Sometimes I am with Clarence in his dream. At others, I behold Christian beginning to sink, and crying out to his good brother Hopeful (that is to me), 'I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head, all the waves go over me. Selah.' Then I have before me Palinurus, just letting go the steerage. I cry out too late to save. Next follow—a mournful procession—*suicidal faces*, saved against their wills from drowning; dolefully trailing a length of reluctant gratefulness, with ropy weeds pendant from locks of watchet hue—constrained Lazari—Pluto's half-subjects—stolen fees from the grave—bilking Charon of his fare. At their head Arion—or is it G. D.?—in his singing garments marcheth singly, with harp in hand, and votive garland, which Machaon (or Dr. Hawes) snatcheth straight, intending to suspend it to the stern God of

Sea. Then follow dismal streams of Lethe, in which the half-drenched on earth are constrained to drown downright, by wharfs where Ophelia twice acts her muddy death.

"And, doubtless, there is some notice in that invisible world, when one of us approacheth (as my friend did so lately) to their inexorable precincts. When a soul knocks once, twice, at death's door, the sensation aroused within the palace must be considerable; and the grim Feature, by modern science so often dispossessed of his prey, must have learned by this time to pity Tantalus.

"A pulse assuredly was felt along the line of the Elysian shades, when the near arrival of G. D. was announced by no equivocal indications. From their seats of Asphodel arose the gentler and the graver ghosts—poet, or historian—of Grecian or of Roman lore—to crown with unfading chaplets the half-finished love-labours of their unwearied scholiast. Him Markland expected—him Tyrwhitt hoped to encounter—him the sweet lyrist of Peter House, whom he had barely seen upon earth, with newest airs prepared to greet ——; and, patron of the gentle Christ's boy,—who should have been his patron through life—the mild Askew, with longing aspirations, leaned foremost from his venerable Æsculapian chair, to welcome into that happy company the matured virtues of the man, whose tender scions in the boy he himself upon earth had so prophetically fed and watered." There we see Dyer vicariously making exquisite and imperishable literature. Our debt to G. D.'s short sight is very great. Lamb, however, I ought perhaps to say, stretches a point when he makes himself a witness of the immersion. He did not return until Dyer was in bed.

Of that absence of mind of which the above passages give an example, all Dyer's friends have spoken. Edmund Ollier, in his reminiscences of Lamb, tells as good a story as any. "Once, when Dyer had been spending the evening at Leigh Hunt's house on Hampstead Heath, he came back a quarter of an hour after leaving, when the family had gone up to their bedrooms. 'What is the matter?' asked Hunt. 'I think, sir,' said Dyer, in his simpering, apologetic way, 'I think I have left one of my shoes behind me.' He had indeed shuffled it off under the table and did not discover his loss until he had gone a long way." At a breakfast party, described by Procter, Dyer omitted the tea.

On the omission being pointed out he set it right by emptying a paper of ginger into the teapot. His guest affected to make a meal, but, as soon as he decently could, said good-bye and hurried to a coffee-tavern for something to satisfy his hunger. He was just finishing a capital breakfast when Dyer came in, either to read the paper or to inquire after an acquaintance who frequented the house. Recognising Procter, he asked him how he did; but he had entirely forgotten their previous meeting and expressed no surprise at seeing him devouring a second breakfast. (It was in reference to Dyer's economies, Procter adds, that Lamb re-christened his dog. Dyer had a dog whose name was Tobit; Lamb called him No-bit.) The story of Procter's adventure was elaborately worked up by Leigh Hunt in the sketch in *Men, Women and Books* called "Jack Abbot's Breakfast" where Dyer figures as Goodall. Hunt's description of him ends thus: "In a word, he was a sort of better-bred Dominie Sampson—a Goldsmith, with the genius taken out of him, but the goodness left—an angel of the dusty heaven of bookstalls and the British Museum."

Among other stories of Dyer's absence of mind is that told by Mrs. Le Breton, in her *Memories of Seventy Years*, of his taking up a coalscuttle in place of his hat; while on another occasion he walked off with a footman's cockaded hat and did not discover the mistake until some one commiserated with him on his fall in fortune.

Talfourd's description of George Dyer mentions his "gaunt, awkward form, set off by trousers too short . . . and a rusty coat as much too large for the wearer . . . ; his long head silvered over with short yet straggling hair, and his dark grey eyes." One or two of the inventions with which Lamb caused those eyes to glisten in faith and amazement are given in Talfourd's narrative, as when he told him in strict confidence that Castlereagh had confessed to the authorship of the Waverley Novels. Talfourd records also the perfect reply made by Dyer to Lamb's question, put to him to test his kindliness of heart, as to what he thought of the terrible Williams, the Ratcliffe Highway murderer (made immortal by De Quincey), who had first destroyed two families and then committed suicide. After a sufficient pause for consideration the answer came: "I should think, Mr. Lamb, he must have been rather an eccentric character."

Dyer, poor enough for many years of his life, was possessed of a sufficiency in his later years. The beginning of his good fortune was his inclusion among the ten executors and residuary legatees of the third Lord Stanhope, "Citizen Stanhope," who died in 1816; George Dyer having at one time acted as tutor in his family. Mrs. Barbauld, a friend of Dyer, was of opinion that Stanhope must have been insane, and Dyer himself was, says Crabb Robinson, one of the first to declare that he rejected the legacy and renounced the executorship; but the heir insisted on granting him a small annuity, and this, added to another which Dyer's friends had settled upon him, made his declining years quite comfortable. It was probably just after Stanhope's death that Lamb, as Talfourd tells us, inquired gravely of Dyer if it were true, as commonly reported, that he was to be made a lord. "O dear no, Mr. Lamb, I couldn't think of such a thing; it is not true, I assure you." "I thought not," said Lamb, "and I contradict it wherever I go; but the Government will not ask your consent; they may raise you to the peerage without your ever knowing it." "I hope not, Mr. Lamb, indeed, indeed, I hope not; it would not suit me at all." Leigh Hunt tells us that Dyer was one of the little trusting company whom Lamb sent to Primrose Hill at daybreak to watch the Persian ambassador worshipping the sun. Though he made fun of Dyer's oddities, Lamb admired him and loved him always. "God never put a kinder heart into flesh of man than George Dyer's" he once said.

George Dyer's odd manner of talking has been realistically preserved for us by Charles Cowden Clarke, in *Recollections of Writers*. "He had a trick of filling up his hesitating sentences with a mild little monosyllabic sound, and of finishing his speeches with the incomplete phrase, 'Well, sir; but however——'. This peculiarity we used to amuse ourselves by imitating when we talked of him and recalled his oddities, as thus:—'You have met with a curious and rare book, you say? Indeed, sir; abd—abd—abd—perhaps you would allow me to look at it; abd—abd—abd— Well, sir; but however——' Or: 'You have been ill, sir, I hear. Dear me! abd—abd—abd—I'm sorry, I'm sure; abd—abd—abd— Well, sir; but however——' Once when he came to see us he told us of his having lately spent some time among a wandering tribe of Gipsies, he feeling much

GEORGE DYER (AGED 40)

FROM A PORTRAIT BY J. CRISTALL IN THE *COLLECTONIA BIOGRAPHICA*

desire to know something of the language and habits of this interesting race of people, and believing he could not do so better than by joining them in one of their rambling expeditions."

Dyer had loved once, as we have seen; he loved also the widow of Gilbert Wakefield, and even dared to propose to her, much (as Mrs. Le Breton, her niece, tells us) to her indignation. It was long before he was forgiven. At last his gentle celibacy was to be ended: somewhen about the year 1825 a widow three-deep, a Mrs. Mather, who had inherited from her third husband chambers opposite Dyer, was happily inspired to suggest that he should accept her as wife and guardian; and he did so with very pleasant results, his only regret being expressed in a remark once made to Crabb Robinson, "Mrs. Dyer is a woman of excellent natural sense, but she is not literate." A charming account of the marriage is given by Mrs. Augustus De Morgan, born Sophia Frend, a daughter of Dyer's counsellor, William Frend, of Cambridge. Mrs. De Morgan writes, in her *Memoirs of Augustus De Morgan:* "Late in life a tide came in his affairs. A kind woman, the widow of a solicitor, who owned the chambers opposite to his, watched him going in and out, and saw his quiet, harmless ways. As she afterwards said in her Devonshire dialect, she 'couldn't abear to see the peure gentleman so neglected.' So she made acquaintance with him, invited him across the Inn, and gave him tea and hot cakes and muffins 'comfortable.' At one of these entertainments when the guest was expressing his satisfaction and thankfulness, she observed:—

"'Yes, Mr. Dyer, sir, you du want some one to look after you.'

"The rejoinder was ready: 'Will you be that one?'

"'Well, sir, I don't say but what I've thought of it; but you must speak to your friends, and let me see them, and if Mr. Frend approves——'

"So my father was informed of the proposal, and in some alarm went to meet the intended victim at the chambers of the 'designing widow,' who had already 'buried' three husbands. His views of the case were soon altered. She was so simple, so open, and so evidently kindhearted, that, after examining and comparing all circumstances, he thought that his old friend's

happiness would be secured by the marriage. It took place shortly afterwards in St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet Street.

"When the newly married pair came to visit us at Stoke Newington, we who were in doubt as to what we were to expect were pleased to find her a sensible, kindly-hearted woman, who had made of our neglected old friend a fine-looking, well-dressed elderly man, beaming with kindness and happiness."

Another story of Dyer which Mrs. De Morgan tells illustrates Frend's sense of mischief as well as the old scholar's mildness: "At one period of his life—I fancy before he went as a sizar to Emmanuel College—Dyer was a Baptist Minister. I have seen his consternation and alarm when thus reminded of his ministrations by my father.

"Wm. Frend: 'You know, Dyer, that was before you drowned the woman.'

"G. Dyer: '*I* never drowned any woman!'

"Wm. Frend: 'You have forgotten.' To the company generally: 'Dyer had taken the woman's hand and made her dip in the water; he then pronounced the blessing and left her there.'

"G. Dyer (troubled): 'No, no; you are joking. It could not be.'"

Lamb wrote the following lines to William Frend:—

> Friend of the friendless, friend of all mankind,
> To thy wide friendships I have not been blind;
> But looking at them nearly, in the end
> I love thee most that thou art Dyer's Frend.

Cowden Clarke, writing of Dyer's marriage, says: "It was great gratification to us to see how the old student's rusty suit of black, threadbare and shining with the shabbiness of neglect, the limp wisp of jaconet muslin, yellow with age, round his throat, the dusty shoes, and stubbly beard, had become exchanged for a coat that shone only with the lustre of regular brushing, a snow-white cravat neatly tied on, brightly blacked shoes, and a close-shaven chin—the whole man presenting a cosy and burnished appearance, like one carefully and affectionately tended. He, like Charles Lamb, always wore black smalls, black stockings (which Charles Lamb generally covered with high black gaiters) and black shoes; the knee-smalls and the shoes both being tied with strings instead of fastened with

buckles. His hair, white and stiff, glossy at the time now spoken of from due administration of comb and brush, contrasted strongly with a pair of small dark eyes, worn with much poring over Greek and black-letter characters; while even at an advanced age there was a sweet look of kindliness, simple goodness, serenity, and almost childlike guilelessness that characteristically marked his face at all periods of his life."

In Dyer's last years Crabb Robinson used to read to him occasionally on Sunday morning; but his customary help in this way came from a poor man who rendered the service for sixpence an hour. G. D. died on March 2nd, 1841, aged eighty-six all but a fortnight. William Frend was ill at the same time, dying on February 21st. The news of his death was kept from Dyer for some days, and Mrs. De Morgan's beautiful account of George Dyer's last moments makes the end of the two friends synchronise. "During his last illness poor George Dyer sent up daily to inquire after him. When the messenger came back for the last time, he asked for the news, and was told he was rather better. 'I understand,' he said; 'Mr. Frend is dead. Lay me beside him.' He then went into an adjoining room, washed his hands, returned, and quietly sat down in his armchair, as it was thought, to listen to a kind friend (Miss Matilda Betham) who came to read to him. Before beginning she looked up to her hearer, but the loving-hearted old man was dead."

George Dyer's widow survived him for twenty years. She died in May, 1861, in her hundred-and-first year. Crabb Robinson called on her in August, 1860, when "she spoke in warm praise of Charles and Mary Lamb."

## CHAPTER XV

### 1799

Robert Lloyd at Pentonville—The Death of Mr. Lamb—Old Dorrell—Mary Lamb with Her Brother Again—"Old China"—Early Excursions—Book-Buying—Brother and Sister at the Play—Thomas Manning—Mock Latin—The Lambs' Finances.

IN the first letter of 1799, dated January 21st, Lamb tells Southey a startling piece of news. "Robert [Lloyd] (the flower of his family) hath eloped from the persecutions of his father, and has taken shelter with me. What the issue of his adventure will be, I know not. He hath the sweetness of an angel in his heart, combined with admirable firmness of purpose: an uncultivated, but very original, and, I think, superior genius." A week or so later Lamb writes again: "Robert still continues here with me, his father has proposed nothing, but would willingly lure him back with fair professions. But Robert is endowed with a wise fortitude, and in this business has acted quite from himself, and wisely acted. His parents must come forward in the End. I like reducing parents to a sense of undutifulness. I like confounding the relations of life."[1]

[1] One of Lamb's more serious letters to Robert Lloyd shows that he could be on the side of the parents too. Robert Lloyd had objected to attend the Quakers' meeting; his father wished him to. Lamb writes: "I decidedly consider your refusal as a breach of that God-descended precept—Honour and observe thy parents in all lawful things. Silent worship cannot be *Un*lawful; there is no Idolatry, no invocation of saints, no bowing before the consecrated wafer in all this, nothing which a wise man would refuse, or a good man fear to do. What is it? Sitting a few hours in a week with certain good people who call *that* worship. You subscribe to no articles—if your mind wanders, it is no crime in you who do not give credit to these infusions of the spirit. They sit in a temple, you sit as in a room adjoining, only do not disturb their pious work with gabbling, nor your own necessary peace with heart-burnings at your not ill-meaning parents, nor a silly contempt of the work which is going on before

Exactly what had happened we do not know; but the Lloyds were in great trouble at the time, owing partly to the illness of Priscilla, and I suspect that Robert, in the midst of it, announced his intention of taking to literature as a profession, and that his father very properly opposed it. How long he remained at Pentonville I cannot discover, but in June we find his sister Priscilla addressing him at Bath: "Lamb would not I think by any means be a person to take up your abode with. He is too much like yourself—he would encourage those feelings which it certainly is your duty to suppress. Your station in life—the duties which are pointed out by that rank in society which you are destined to fulfil—differ widely from his." "Charles," Priscilla added, "wishes you to call on Southey at Bristol frequently." Robert Lloyd's unsettlement was ultimately brought to an end by the purchase for him by his father of a partnership in a bookselling and printing business in Birmingham.

Between March and October, 1799, there are no letters, but two very important events occurred in the interval: the death of Lamb's father, and the consequent return of Mary Lamb to make her home with her brother. Of John Lamb's peevish state in his last days we have already seen something; his son tells more in the essay on the Old Benchers of the Inner Temple. "I saw him in his old age and the decay of his faculties, palsy-smitten, in the last sad stage of human weakness —'a remnant most forlorn of what he was,'—yet even then his eye would light up upon the mention of his favourite Garrick. He was greatest, he would say, in Bayes—'was upon the stage nearly throughout the whole performance, and as busy as a bee.' At intervals, too, he would speak of his former life, and how he came up a little boy from Lincoln to go to service, and how his mother cried at parting with him, and how he returned, after some few years' absence, in his smart new livery to see her, and she blessed herself at the change, and could hardly be brought to believe that it was 'her own bairn.' And then, the excitement subsiding, he would weep, till I have wished that sad

you. I know that if my parents were to live again, I would do more things to please them than merely sitting still six hours in a week. Perhaps I enlarge too much on this affair, but indeed your objection seems to me ridiculous, and involving in it a principle of frivolous and vexatious resistance."

second-childhood might have a mother still to lay its head upon her lap. But the common mother of us all in no long time after received him gently into hers."

John Lamb died in April, and was buried on the 13th at St. James's, Clerkenwell, as his sister had been. His will is a very simple one, leaving to his wife everything with the exception of the two small bequests to his sisters mentioned on page 19. Elizabeth Lamb having predeceased him, the will was administered by John Lamb and Charles Lamb, on May 7th, 1799.

The witnesses to the will when it was made in 1761, nearly fourteen years before Charles was born, were William Dorrell and Hannah Halstead; and here we have a clue to the name Dorrell, which twice occurs mysteriously in Lamb's writings. In the essay "New Year's Eve," written in 1820, he says: "It was better that our family should have missed that legacy, which old Dorrell cheated us of, than that I should have at this moment two thousand pounds *in banco*, and be without the idea of that specious old rogue." And again, in the verses "Gone or Going," written in 1827, from which I have already quoted—a series of recollections of very early friends and acquaintances—we find these stanzas upon "wicked old Dorrel ('gainst whom I've a quarrel)":—

Had he mended in right time,
He need not in night time,
(That black hour, and fright-time,)
  Till sexton interr'd him,
Have groan'd in his coffin,
While demons stood scoffing—
You'd ha' thought him a-coughing—
  My own father[1] heard him!

Could gain so importune,
With occasion opportune,
That for a poor Fortune,
  That should have been ours.[2]
In soul he should venture
To pierce the dim center,
Where will-forgers enter
  Amid the dark Powers.—

[1] Who sat up with him.
[2] I have this fact from Parental tradition only.

Precisely what Dorrell did we cannot tell; his offence is probably among the things that will never be made clear.

I imagine that it was immediately after his father's death that Lamb moved from 45 Chapel Street, Pentonville, to No. 36, in the same street, where his sister joined him and where they lived together until the spring of 1800. It would be particularly to this period that Mary Lamb refers (as Bridget Elia) in the essay "Old China," since she speaks there of her and her brother's old life in Islington, and No. 36 Chapel Street was as near Islington as could be; although it is of course possible and even probable that certain later experiences were blended in her reminiscences. "'I wish the good old times would come again,' she said, 'when we were not quite so rich. I do not mean, that I want to be poor; but there was a middle state;'—so she was pleased to ramble on,—'in which I am sure we were a great deal happier. A purchase is but a purchase, now that you have money enough and to spare. Formerly it used to be a triumph. When we coveted a cheap luxury (and, O! how much ado I had to get you to consent in those times!) we were used to have a debate two or three days before, and to weigh the *for* and *against*, and think what we might spare it out of, and what saving we could hit upon, that should be an equivalent. A thing was worth buying then, when we felt the money that we paid for it.

"'Do you remember the brown suit, which you made to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so thread-bare—and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher, which you dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent-garden? Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase, and had not come to a determination till it was near ten o'clock of the Saturday night, when you set off from Islington, fearing you should be too late—and when the old bookseller with some grumbling opened his shop, and by the twinkling taper (for he was setting bed-wards) lighted out the relic from his dusty treasures—and when you lugged it home, wishing it were twice as cumbersome—and when you presented it to me—and when we were exploring the perfectness of it (*collating*, you called it)—and while I was repairing some of the loose leaves with paste, which your impatience would not suffer to be left till day-break—was there no

pleasure in being a poor man? or can those neat black clothes which you wear now, and are so careful to keep brushed, since we have become rich and finical, give you half the honest vanity, with which you flaunted it about in that over-worn suit—your old corbeau—for four or five weeks longer than you should have done, to pacify your conscience for the mighty sum of fifteen—or sixteen shillings, was it?—a great affair we thought it then—which you had lavished on the old folio. Now you can afford to buy any book that pleases you, but I do not see that you ever bring me home any nice old purchases now.

"'When you come home with twenty apologies for laying out a less number of shillings upon that print after Lionardo, which we christened the "Lady Blanch;" when you looked at the purchase, and thought of the money—and thought of the money, and looked again at the picture—was there no pleasure in being a poor man? Now, you have nothing to do but to walk into Colnaghi's, and buy a wilderness of Lionardos. Yet do you?

"'Then, do you remember our pleasant walks to Enfield, and Potter's Bar, and Waltham, when we had a holyday—holydays, and all other fun, are gone, now we are rich—and the little hand-basket in which I used to deposit our day's fare of savory cold lamb and salad—and how you would pry about at noontide for some decent house, where we might go in, and produce our store—only paying for the ale that you must call for—and speculate upon the looks of the landlady, and whether she was likely to allow us a table-cloth—and wish for such another honest hostess, as Izaak Walton has described many a one on the pleasant banks of the Lea, when he went a fishing—and sometimes they would prove obliging enough, and sometimes they would look grudgingly upon us—but we had cheerful looks still for one another, and would eat our plain food savorily, scarcely grudging Piscator his Trout Hall? Now, when we go out a day's pleasuring, which is seldom moreover, we *ride* part of the way—and go into a fine inn, and order the best of dinners, never debating the expense—which, after all, never has half the relish of those chance country snaps, when we were at the mercy of uncertain usage, and a precarious welcome.

"'You are too proud to see a play anywhere now but in the

pit. Do you remember where it was we used to sit, when we saw the battle of Hexham, and the surrender of Calais, and Bannister and Mrs. Bland in the Children in the Wood—when we squeezed out our shillings a-piece to sit three or four times in a season in the one-shilling gallery—where you felt all the time that you ought not to have brought me—and more strongly I felt obligation to you for having brought me—and the pleasure was the better for a little shame—and when the curtain drew up, what cared we for our place in the house, or what mattered it where we were sitting, when our thoughts were with Rosalind in Arden, or with Viola at the Court of Illyria? You used to say, that the gallery was the best place of all for enjoying a play socially—that the relish of such exhibitions must be in proportion to the infrequency of going—that the company we met there, not being in general readers of plays, were obliged to attend the more, and did attend, to what was going on, on the stage—because a word lost would have been a chasm, which it was impossible for them to fill up. With such reflections we consoled our pride then—and I appeal to you, whether, as a woman, I met generally with less attention and accommodation, than I have done since in more expensive situations in the house? The getting in indeed, and the crowding up those inconvenient staircases, was bad enough,—but there was still a law of civility to women recognised to quite as great an extent as we ever found in the other passages—and how a little difficulty overcome heightened the snug seat, and the play, afterwards! Now we can only pay our money, and walk in. You cannot see, you say, in the galleries now. I am sure we saw, and heard too, well enough then—but sight, and all, I think, is gone with our poverty.'"

It is, I imagine, of this 36 Chapel Street period that Barry Cornwall writes in his Memoir of Lamb: "Whenever the approach of one of her [Mary Lamb's] fits of insanity was announced, by some irritability or change of manner, Lamb would take her, under his arm, to Hoxton Asylum. It was very affecting to encounter the young brother and his sister walking together (weeping together) on this painful errand; Mary herself, although sad, very conscious of the necessity for temporary separation from her only friend. They used to carry a strait jacket with them." Charles Lloyd told Talfourd that once he

met them thus together, in tears.[1] Later, as Lamb's finances improved, Mary Lamb was cared for privately when ill, either at home or with a nurse elsewhere.

The correspondence opens again with a letter to Southey dated October 31st, 1799, in which Lamb says that he has just returned from spending some red letter-days at Widford: "I could tell of a *wilderness*, and of a village church, and where the bones of my honoured grandam lie; but there are feelings which refuse to be translated, sulky aborigines, which will not be naturalised in another soil. Of this nature are old family faces and scenes of infancy."

The correspondence is continued by an unpublished letter to Charles Lloyd, in which Lamb asks for the return of his play, as John Philip Kemble has offered to place it in the hands of the proprietor of Drury Lane, and Lamb therefore wishes to have a second copy in the house. We thus hear of the first of several attempts to get on terms with the stage, an ambition which Lamb cherished in vain all his life.

The letter is valuable also in first introducing the name of a new friend, Thomas Manning, who was destined to have a strong influence on Lamb's character; and incidentally also it gives news of Coleridge, who, returned from Germany, had settled at 21 Buckingham Street, Strand (to be near the *Morning Post*), where his wife and Hartley joined him early in December. Charles Lloyd, I might add, having married Sophia Pemberton (without the assistance of Southey or the blacksmith of Gretna Green), was now settled in lodgings in Jesus Lane, Cambridge,

[1] It was on hearing of this incident that Valentine Le Grice, in 1849, wrote the following poem:—

An angel's wing is waving o'er their head,
While they, the brother and sister walk;
Nor dare, as heedless of its fanning, talk
Of woes which are not buried with the dead.

Hand clasped in hand they move: adown their cheek
From the full heart-spring, tears o'erflowing gush;
Close and more close they clasp, as if to speak
Would wake the sorrows which they seek to hush.

Down to the mansion slow their footsteps tend,
Where blank despair is soothed by mercy's spell;
Pausing in momentary pray'r to bend,
Ere the cheered sister passes to her cell.

Strong in the hope that yet there will be given
Calm and sweet hours—foretastes [to them] of heaven.

with his wife, bent upon completing his irregular education; which he was doing partly with the assistance of Manning. In the absence of dates, I am presuming that this letter to Lloyd precedes Lamb's first letter to Manning; but the point is immaterial.

Thomas Manning, to whom Lamb had been presented on a recent visit to the Lloyds, and in whom he had at once detected a congenial spirit, was twenty-seven in November, 1799; Lamb would be twenty-five in the following February. He was the son of the rector of Diss, in Norfolk, and might possibly have gone into the Church had he not objected to oaths and tests. As it was, he did not take his degree, but after ceasing to be an undergraduate of Caius, remained at Cambridge as a tutor of mathematics, in which capacity he met Lloyd. Among his friends were Porson, Baron Maseres, and Tuthill the physician, who became also a friend of the Lambs. We shall see much of Manning from time to time in the next few years; meanwhile it is enough to say that he was the most considerable man that Lamb had met intimately since he left school. Particularly at this period was it useful for him to have a friend of such fine intelligence and humour; the time was exactly ripe. Coleridge for a while was lost; White was merely a droll; Charles Lloyd was morbid and dangerous; Robert Lloyd was dependent and unformed. In Manning Lamb found reserves of strength and an intellect with stuff to it.

Lamb wrote of Manning always in superlatives. To Robert Lloyd, "I believe I told you I have been to see *Manning*. He is a dainty chiel.—A man of great Power—an enchanter almost.—Far beyond Coleridge or any man in power of impressing—when he gets you alone, he can act the wonders of Egypt. Only he is lazy, and does not always put forth all his strength; if he did, I know no man of genius at all comparable to him." And to Coleridge (a quarter of a century later), "I am glad you esteem Manning, though you see but his husk or shrine. He discloses not, save to select worshippers, and will leave the world without any one hardly but me knowing how stupendous a creature he is." Unfortunately Manning's power—like that of dead actors—remains a matter of hearsay. He has left no work to prove it; while his familiar letters to Lamb contain curiously few signs either of humour or of profundity of thought.

Lamb's words, however, carry conviction ; and this is fortified by the excellence of the letters which Manning drew from Lamb. Manning was a talker, and many talkers are very poor writers. He seems also to have had something of the actor's gifts, for Lamb more than once insists upon the wonder of his grimaces.

In later life Manning became serious, more eccentric and not a little embittered ; but I have seen certain documents proving that his sense of fun and nonsense was quick in those early days. One sheet is covered with mock titles for sensational stories, in which Lamb may have had a hand : the best is "The Corpse with the Long Nails." Another sheet is given up to mock Latin. I copy three sentences, with translation :—

Notae formae missarum. No tea for me, Miss Sarum.
Narre et formare. Nor yet for Mary.
Narre et formicat. Nor yet for my cat.

(Lamb, as we know, also experimented alone in this form of humour ; in a manuscript volume compiled by William Ayrton and lettered "Lamb's Works, Vol. III.," uniform with the two volumes of the *Works*, 1818, are several examples in the same manner. One evening, as I conjecture, Ayrton and others had written at random certain English sentences, which Lamb had undertaken to turn into mock Latin. Thus, against "I read Steele, Addison, a bit of Farquhar. I detest Hervey, I mean his morality," Lamb has written : "Ire des tela da sonabit o far qua ridet est arva Hymen his moralite.")

Largely under the stimulus of Manning's personality, Lamb, whose "scribbling days were past," as he told that friend in his first letter to him in December, 1799, wrote in 1800 more letters than in any year of his life until 1823. The Manning-inspired correspondence of 1800 is, moreover, of greater interest than that of any one later year, both intrinsically and because it marks the beginnings of Lamb as we know him best—the authentic Lamb, shrewd, humorous, independent, balanced between fun and seriousness, puns and wisdom. The saddest part of his life was over ; the tragedy was three years behind him ; his sister, often in good health, was restored to him ; Manning's ready, sympathetic laugh was always in the background ; Coleridge was once again in London, accessible whenever the impulse came to seek him ; and other new friends were being added to the circle.

The Lambs were not rich—£90, with some small additions for overtime and holidays, was the salary in 1800—but there must have been something from the father's estate, enough at any rate to put them beyond want. His salary thenceforward rose by £10 every two years until 1815, when, as we shall see, it became suddenly much larger. From the beginning of the century he was also in receipt of an annual gratuity which began at £30 and rose steadily. There was furthermore a holiday allowance of £10, and extra work was paid for. When once a clerk had been long enough in the office to partake of all the privileges, he was in a favourable financial position.

These figures, I hope, make it clear that the picture that has sometimes been drawn of Lamb as always "a poor clerk" should be effaced. Lamb had never been poor in any extreme sense, had never had to do more than practise economy, short of much self-denial; while from 1800 onward he was a stranger to any real anxiety from monetary causes, although there were, in the next few years, occasions when a slightly larger income would have been welcome.

## CHAPTER XVI

### 1800

William Godwin—"Toad or Frog"—Coleridge at 36 Chapel Street—An Evening with Blue-stockings—Home in London Once More—Mary Lamb's First Poem—John Rickman—*John Woodvil* Again—Lamb and London—"Antonio"—John Philip Kemble—The Cambridge Itinerary.

WITH the first letter of 1800 Lamb's correspondence with Coleridge reopens. "I expect," says Lamb, "Manning of Cambridge in town to-night—will you fulfil your promise of meeting him at my house? He is a man of a thousand. Give me a line to say what day, whether Saturday, Sunday, Monday, &c., and if Sara and the Philosopher can come. I am afraid if I did not at intervals call upon you, I should *never see you.* But I forget, the affairs of the nation engross your time and your mind." The Philosopher was Hartley Coleridge, aged three, and the "affairs of the nation" is a reference to Coleridge's work as leader writer on the *Morning Post.*

On February 13th Lamb tells Manning of a new friend—William Godwin. "Godwin I am a good deal pleased with. He is a very well-behaved, decent man, nothing very brilliant about him, or imposing, as you may suppose; quite another guess sort of gentleman from what your Anti-Jacobin Christians imagine him. I was well pleased to find he has neither horns nor claws; quite a tame creature, I assure you. A middle-sized man, both in stature and in understanding; whereas, from his noisy fame, you would expect to find a Briareus Centimanus or a Tityus tall enough to pull Jupiter from his heavens."

Southey tells us that Coleridge brought Lamb and Godwin together shortly after the first number of the *Anti-Jacobin Magazine and Review* was published, containing the caricature by Gillray, which we have seen, depicting Lloyd and Lamb as toad and frog. The date, however, must have been January

or February, 1800, for Coleridge was not in London in August, 1798, nor on terms with Lamb. Southey continues, "Lamb got warmed with whatever was on the table, became disputatious, and said things to Godwin which made him quietly say, 'Pray, Mr. Lamb, are you toad or frog?' Mrs. Coleridge will remember the scene, which was to her sufficiently uncomfortable. But the next morning S. T. C. called on Lamb, and found Godwin breakfasting with him, from which time their intimacy began." In a letter to Joseph Cottle, March 13th, 1797, Southey says: "As for Godwin himself, he has large noble eyes, and a *nose*—oh, most abominable nose! Language is not vituperatious enough to describe the effect of its downward elongation."

In March, 1800, William Godwin would be forty-four, Lamb's senior by nineteen years; his *Political Justice* had appeared in 1793, *Caleb Williams* in 1794, and *St. Leon* in 1799. His wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, had died in 1797, leaving him with two infant daughters: one his own (afterwards Mrs. Shelley), a mere baby, and one Imlay's, known as Fanny Godwin. He was living in the Polygon, Somer's Town, and was meditating his tragedy of "Antonio," to which we shall shortly come. Lamb and Godwin were never close friends, but they knew each other's worth, and Godwin, as we shall see, made literary suggestions to Lamb and his sister but for which the world might have lost the *Tales from Shakespear* and *Mrs. Leicester's School.*

The letter to Manning of March 17th, 1800, has news. "I am living in a continuous feast. Coleridge has been with me now for nigh three weeks, and the more I see of him in the quotidian undress and relaxation of his mind, the more cause I see to love him, and believe him a *very good man*, and all those foolish impressions to the contrary fly off like morning slumbers. He is engaged in translations, which I hope will keep him this month to come. He is uncommonly kind and friendly to me. He ferrets me day and night, to *do something*. He tends me, amidst all his own worrying and heart-oppressing occupations, as a gardener tends his young *tulip*. Marry come up! what a pretty similitude, and how like your humble servant! He has lugged me to the brink of engaging to a newspaper, and has suggested to me for a first plan the forgery of a supposed manuscript of Burton the anatomist of melancholy. I have even written the introductory letter; and, if

I can pick up a few guineas this way, I feel they will be most *refreshing*, bread being so dear." Coleridge, having left the *Morning Post* in February, and sent his family to Bristol, had joined the Lambs at Pentonville, where he was busy on his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* (for which Lamb wrote an admirable version of "Thekla's Song" from the literal prose supplied by Coleridge, which, however, was not used in the text). Exactly when Coleridge left the Lambs cannot be determined; our next sight of him is at Grasmere on April 21st.

Lamb's reference to newspaper work brings us to his first inauspicious attempt to form a connection with the *Morning Post*. The editor, Daniel Stuart, a very shrewd Scotsman, was Coleridge's friend and a brother-in-law of Sir James Mackintosh. Lamb seems to have tried him with several articles, all much too literary, without result. The records are not very clear, but I doubt if Lamb succeeded in getting anything into the *Post* until the end of 1801. The imitations of Burton which Stuart refused (with, speaking journalistically, good reason) are, after the dedication to *Falstaff's Letters* and *Rosamund Gray*, the earliest specimens of Lamb's prose that exist, and, although not calculated to "strike a bliss" upon a morning paper, are as ingenious and entertaining a parody of the Anatomist of Melancholy as one could ask; and something more too, for never, I think, has an imitator been more successful than was Lamb in conveying both the manner and matter of his original. They are almost Burton himself; which is very extraordinary when one reflects that Burton was an ancient scholar of the early seventeenth century and Lamb a young clerk at the dawn of the nineteenth.

In April Lamb sends Coleridge a manuscript copy of his play (still under consideration at Drury Lane) which is to be presented to Wordsworth and his sister; and he then describes, with a humour until now lacking in the letters, but henceforward to be a characteristic of them, an evening among Bluestockings. Coleridge, it seems, had become acquainted with Sarah Wesley (1760-1828), the daughter of Charles Wesley and niece of John and Samuel Wesley, a lady who mixed in literary society; Miss Wesley had a friend named Elizabeth Ogilvy Benger (1778-1827), who knew Mrs. Barbauld and Mrs. Inchbald (whom Lamb called the two bald women), wrote a

biography of John Tobin, the dramatist, and was described by Madame de Staël as the most interesting woman she had met in England; and Miss Benger found her way to 36 Chapel Street, probably in the hope of finding Coleridge there. Here is Lamb's story: "You encouraged that mopsey, Miss Wesley, to dance after you, in the hope of having her nonsense put into a nonsensical Anthology. We have pretty well shaken her off, by that simple expedient of referring her to you; but there are more burrs in the wind. I came home t'other day from business, hungry as a hunter, to dinner, with nothing, I am sure, of *the author but hunger* about me, and whom found I closeted with Mary but a friend of this Miss Wesley, one Miss Benje, or Benjey—I don't know how she spells her name. I just came in time enough, I believe, luckily to prevent them from exchanging vows of eternal friendship. It seems she is one of your authoresses, that you first foster, and then upbraid us with. But I forgive you. 'The rogue has given me potions to make me love him.' Well; go she would not, nor step a step over our threshold, till we had promised to come and drink tea with her next night. I had never seen her before, and could not tell who the devil it was that was so familiar.

"We went, however, not to be impolite. Her lodgings are up two pairs of stairs in East Street. Tea and coffee, and macaroons—a kind of cake I much love. We sat down. Presently Miss Benje broke the silence, by declaring herself quite of a different opinion from D'Israeli, who supposes the differences of human intellect to be the mere effect of organization. She begged to know my opinion. I attempted to carry it off with a pun upon organ; but that went off very flat. She immediately conceived a very low opinion of my metaphysics; and, turning round to Mary, put some question to her in French, —possibly having heard that neither Mary nor I understood French. The explanation that took place occasioned some embarrassment and much wondering. She then fell into an insulting conversation about the comparative genius and merits of all modern languages, and concluded with asserting that the Saxon was esteemed the purest dialect in Germany. From thence she passed into the subject of poetry; where I, who had hitherto sat mute and a hearer only, humbly hoped I might now put in a word to some advantage, seeing that it was my

own trade in a manner. But I was stopped by a round assertion, that no good poetry had appeared since Dr. Johnson's time. It seems the Doctor has suppressed many hopeful geniuses that way by the severity of his critical strictures in his 'Lives of the Poets.' I here ventured to question the fact, and was beginning to appeal to *names*, but I was assured 'it was certainly the case.'

"Then we discussed Miss More's book on education, which I had never read. It seems Dr. Gregory, another of Miss Benjey's friends, has found fault with one of Miss More's metaphors. Miss More has been at some pains to vindicate herself—in the opinion of Miss Benjey, not without success. It seems the Doctor is invariably against the use of broken or mixed metaphor, which he reprobates against the authority of Shakspeare himself. We next discussed the question, whether Pope was a poet? I find Dr. Gregory is of opinion he was not, though Miss Seward does not at all concur with him in this. We then sat upon the comparative merits of the ten translations of 'Pizarro,' and Miss Benjey or Benje advised Mary to take two of them home; she thought it might afford her some pleasure to compare them *verbatim;* which we declined. It being now nine o'clock, wine and macaroons were again served round, and we parted, with a promise to go again next week, and meet the Miss Porters,[1] who, it seems, have heard much of Mr. Coleridge, and wish to meet *us*, because we are *his* friends. I have been preparing for the occasion. I crowd cotton in my ears. I read all the reviews and magazines of the past month against the dreadful meeting, and I hope by these means to cut a tolerable second-rate figure."

The letter to Coleridge on May 12th tells only of trouble. Mary Lamb has been taken ill again and has gone away, and Hetty, the Lambs' servant, has died. The Chapel Street neighbours also have begun to look askance at the brother and sister. "My heart is quite sunk, and I don't know where to look for relief. Mary will get better again; but her constantly being liable to such relapses is dreadful; nor is it the least of our evils that her case and all our story is so well known around us. We are in a

[1] Jane and Anna Maria: later, authors respectively of *The Scottish Chiefs* and *The Hungarian Brother*.

manner *marked*." On the same day Lamb tells Manning that he has given up his Pentonville house and is now looking for lodgings; meanwhile he is staying with James White, who has "all *kindness* but not *sympathy*." A letter from Coleridge to Godwin, dated May 21st, has this passage: "My poor Lamb! how cruelly afflictions crowd upon him! I am glad that you think of him as I think; he has an affectionate heart, a mind *sui generis;* his taste acts so as to appear like the unmechanic simplicity of an instinct—in brief he is worth an hundred men of mere talents. Conversation with the latter tribe is like the use of leaden bells—one warms by exercise; Lamb every now and then *irradiates*, and the beam, though single and fine as a hair, is yet rich with colours, and I both see and feel it."

A little later Lamb writes more cheerfully to Manning. "I am in much better spirits than when I wrote last. I have had a very eligible offer to lodge with a friend in town. He will have rooms to let at midsummer, by which time I hope my sister will be well enough to join me. It is a great object to me to live in town, where we shall be much more *private*. . . . We can be nowhere private except in the midst of London. We shall be in a family where we visit very frequently." The friend was John Mathew Gutch, a schoolfellow of Lamb and Coleridge, who was living at 27 Southampton Buildings, where he had a business as a law stationer. A letter to Coleridge in the early summer tells more of the new project, and shows Lamb and his sister at last settled together once more, and once more in the heart of London. "Soon after I wrote to you last, an offer was made me by Gutch (you must remember him? at Christ's—you saw him, slightly, one day with Thomson at our house)—to come and lodge with him at his house in Southampton Buildings, Chancery-Lane. This was a very comfortable offer to me, the rooms being at a reasonable rent, and including the use of an old servant, besides being infinitely preferable to ordinary lodgings *in our case*, as you must perceive. As Gutch knew all our story and the perpetual liability to a recurrence in my sister's disorder, probably to the end of her life, I certainly think the offer very generous and very friendly. I have got three rooms (including servant) under £34 a year. Here I soon found myself at home; and here, in six weeks after, Mary was well enough to join me. So we are once more settled. . . . I

have passed two days at Oxford on a visit, which I have long put off, to Gutch's family. The sight of the Bodleian Library and, above all, a fine bust of Bishop Taylor at All Souls', were particularly gratifying to me ; unluckily, it was not a family where I could take Mary with me, and I am afraid there is something of dishonesty in any pleasures I take without *her*. She never goes anywhere."

Passing over several letters about Coleridge's poetry and George Dyer's *Poems* (of which we know something already), we come to a pleasant missive to Coleridge on August 26th, which shows Mary Lamb in her first, or almost first, poetical flight—as the author of a charming little ballad rallying her brother on his affection for the lady in one of the Blakesware portraits. "How do you like this little epigram?" Lamb writes. "It is not my writing, nor had I any finger in it. If you concur with me in thinking it very elegant and very original, I shall be tempted to name the author to you. I will just hint that it is almost or quite a first attempt.

"HELEN REPENTANT TOO LATE

1

High-born Helen, round your dwelling
These twenty years I've paced in vain:
Haughty beauty, your lover's duty
Has been to glory in his pain.

2

High-born Helen! proudly telling
Stories of your cold disdain ;
I starve, I die, now you comply,
And I no longer can complain.

3

These twenty years I've lived on tears,
Dwelling for ever on a frown ;
On sighs I've fed, your scorn my bread ;
I perish now you kind are grown.

4

Can I, who loved my Beloved
But for the 'scorn was in her eye,'
Can I be moved for my Beloved,
When she 'returns me sigh for sigh?'

5

In stately pride, by my bed-side,
High-born Helen's portrait's hung;
Deaf to my praise; my mournful lays
Are nightly to the portrait sung.

6

To that I weep, nor ever sleep,
Complaining all night long to her!
*Helen, grown old, no longer cold,*
*Said,* 'You to all men I prefer.'"

On October 9th Lamb sent to Coleridge one of the best of his early letters—a piece of pure comedy. I quote a little. "I suppose you have heard of the death of Amos Cottle. I paid a solemn visit of condolence to his brother, accompanied by George Dyer, of burlesque memory. I went, trembling to see poor Cottle so immediately upon the event. He was in black; and his younger brother was also in black. Everything wore an aspect suitable to the respect due to the freshly dead. For some time after our entrance nobody spake, till George modestly put in a question, whether *Alfred* was likely to sell. This was Lethe to Cottle, and his poor face, wet with tears, and his kind eye brightened up in a moment. Now I felt it was my cue to speak. I had to thank him for a present of a magnificent copy, and had promised to send him my remarks,—the least thing I could do; so I ventured to suggest, that I perceived a considerable improvement he had made in his first book since the state in which he first read it to me.

"Joseph, who till now had sat with his knees cowering in by the fireplace, wheeled about, and with great difficulty of body shifted the same round to the corner of a table where I was sitting, and first stationing one thigh over the other, which is his sedentary mood, and placidly fixing his benevolent face right against mine, waited my observations. At that moment it came strongly into my mind, that I had got Uncle Toby before me, he looked so kind and so good. I could not say an unkind thing of *Alfred.* So I set my memory to work to recollect what was the name of Alfred's Queen, and with some adroitness recalled the well-known sound to Cottle's ears of Alswitha. At that moment I could perceive that Cottle had forgot his brother was so lately become a blessed spirit. In the language of mathe-

maticians the author was as 9, the brother as 1. I felt my cue, and strong pity working at the root, I went to work, and beslabber'd *Alfred* with most unqualified praise, or only qualifying my praise by the occasional politic interposition of an exception taken against trivial faults, slips, and human imperfections, which, by removing the appearance of insincerity, did but in truth heighten the relish. Perhaps I might have spared that refinement, for Joseph was in a humour to hope and believe *all things*."

On November 3rd, 1800, Lamb tells Manning of another new friend. "I have made an acquisition latterly of a *pleasant hand*, one Rickman, to whom I was introduced by George Dyer, not the most flattering auspices under which one man can be introduced to another—George brings all sorts of people together, setting up a sort of agrarian law, or common property, in matter of society; but for once he has done me a great pleasure, while he was only pursuing a principle, as *ignes fatui may* light you home. This Rickman lives in our Buildings, immediately opposite our house; the finest fellow to drop in a' nights, about nine or ten o'clock—cold bread-and-cheese time—just in the *wishing* time of the night, when you *wish* for somebody to come in, without a distinct idea of a probable anybody. Just in the nick, neither too early to be tedious, nor too late to sit a reasonable time. He is a most pleasant hand: a fine rattling fellow, has gone through life laughing at solemn apes; himself hugely literate, oppressively full of information in all stuff of conversation, from matter of fact to Xenophon and Plato—can talk Greek with Porson, politics with Thelwall, conjecture with George Dyer, nonsense with me, and anything with anybody: a great farmer, somewhat concerned in an agricultural magazine—reads no poetry but Shakspeare, very intimate with Southey, but never reads his poetry: relishes George Dyer, thoroughly penetrates into the ridiculous wherever found, understands the *first time* (a great desideratum in common minds)—you need never twice speak to him; does not want explanations, translations, limitations, as Professor Godwin does when you make an assertion: *up* to anything, *down* to everything—whatever *sapit hominem*. A perfect *man*. All this farrago, which must perplex you to read, and has put me to a little trouble to *select!* only proves how impossible it is to describe a *pleasant hand*. You must see Rickman to know him, for he is

JOHN RICKMAN

FROM THE PORTRAIT BY SAMUEL BELLIN. ENGRAVED BY S. LANE. PUBLISHED IN 1843

Harvard University

a species in one. A new class. An exotic, any slip of which I am proud to put in my garden-pot. The clearest-headed fellow. Fullest of matter with least verbosity."

John Rickman at that time was twenty-nine, between three and four years older than Lamb. He was the son of a clergyman, then in retirement, at Christchurch, in Hampshire, whither, to Lamb's thinking, he too often made a filial journey. On leaving Oxford, Rickman, a born political economist, edited the *Commercial, Agricultural, and Manufacturer's Magazine.* In 1796 he wrote a pamphlet on the expediency of taking the census, which was shown to Charles Abbot, then M.P. for Helston, and afterwards Speaker and Lord Colchester. Abbot, who was interested in this question, made Rickman his secretary in 1797, and in 1800 he introduced the first Census Act, largely through Rickman's assistance.

In 1801—to anticipate a little—Abbot was made Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Rickman accompanied him to Dublin. While there he procured for Southey the secretaryship to Isaac Corry, which he held for a short time. In one of his letters from Dublin Southey writes: "John Rickman is a great man in Dublin and in the eyes of the world, but not one jot altered from the John Rickman of Christchurch, save only that, in compliance with an extorted promise, he has deprived himself of the pleasure of scratching his head, by putting powder in it. He has astonished the people about him. The government stationer hinted to him, when he was giving an order, that if he wanted anything in the pocket-book way, he might as well put it down in the order. Out he pulled his own—'Look, sir, I have bought one for two shillings.' His predecessor admonished him not to let himself down by speaking to any of the clerks. 'Why, sir,' said John Rickman, 'I should not let myself down if I spoke to every man between this and the bridge'! And so he goes on in his own right way." When Abbot was elected Speaker in 1802, Rickman continued as his secretary, and there for the present we may leave him.

In the same letter that tells of Rickman we hear of *John Woodvil* once more. "At last I have written to Kemble, to know the event of my play, which was presented last Christmas. As I suspected, came an answer back that the copy was lost, and could not be found—no hint that anybody had to this

day ever looked into it—with a courteous (reasonable!) request of another copy (if I had one by me,) and a promise of a definitive answer in a week. I could not resist so facile and moderate a demand, so scribbled out another, omitting sundry things . . . and sent this copy, written *all out* (with alterations, &c., *requiring judgment*) in one day and a half! I sent it last night, and am in weekly expectation of the tolling-bell and death-warrant." Much more than a week was, however, to pass.

On November 28th, in another letter to Manning, we have one of the best of Lamb's early passages of ecstasy. The subject is London, which he loved perhaps better than any—more like a lover than any—to the end. "I must confess that I am not romance-bit about *Nature*. The earth, and sea, and sky (when all is said) is but as a house to dwell in. If the inmates be courteous, and good liquors flow like the conduits at an old coronation, if they can talk sensibly and feel properly, I have no need to stand staring upon the gilded looking-glass (that strained my friend's purse-strings in the purchase), nor his five-shilling print over the mantelpiece of old Nabbs the carrier (which only betrays his false taste). Just as important to me (in a sense) is all the furniture of my world—eye-pampering, but satisfies no heart. Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres, churches, Covent Gardens, shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses, ladies cheapening, gentlemen behind counters lying, authors in the street with spectacles, George Dyers (you may know them by their gait), lamps lit at night, pastry-cooks' and silver-smiths' shops, beautiful Quakers of Pentonville, noise of coaches, drowsy cry of mechanic watchman at night, with bucks reeling home drunk; if you happen to wake at midnight, cries of Fire and Stop thief; inns of court, with their learned air, and halls, and butteries, just like Cambridge colleges; old book-stalls, Jeremy Taylors, Burtons on Melancholy, and Religio Medicis on every stall. These are thy pleasures, O London with-the-many-sins." (The reference to the beautiful Quakers of Pentonville will be explained in due course.)

This outburst, which was repeated more than once in the letters, and again, with more conscious artifice, in an essay in the *Morning Post*, serves to show us something of Lamb's

delight in being, after nearly four years of exile in Pentonville, once again on his own ground, at the beginning of a period of urban domestication with his sister which was to last, with a few interruptions, for almost a quarter of a century. And here I should like to quote a passage from one who, so different in many ways, wrote with perfect comprehension and delicacy not only of Lamb but of that prose author whom perhaps he most admired—Sir Thomas Browne. The passage is in Walter Pater's *Appreciations*. "He felt the genius of places; and I sometimes think he resembles the place he knew and liked best, and where his lot fell—London, sixty-five years ago, with Covent Garden and the old theatres, and the Temple gardens still unspoiled, Thames gliding down, and beyond to north and south the fields of Enfield or Hampton, to which, 'with their living trees,' the thoughts wander 'from the hard wood of the desk'—fields fresher, and coming nearer to town then, but in one of which the present writer remembers, on a brooding early summer's day, to have heard the cuckoo for the first time. Here, the surface of things is certainly humdrum, the streets dingy, the green places, where the child goes a-maying, tame enough. But nowhere are things more apt to respond to the brighter weather, nowhere is there so much difference between rain and sunshine, nowhere do the clouds roll together more grandly; those quaint suburban pastorals gathering a certain quality of grandeur from the background of the great city, with its weighty atmosphere, and portent of storm in the rapid light on dome and bleached stone steeples."

Early in December Lamb was busy upon the epilogue to Godwin's tragedy of "Antonio," which Kemble was about to produce at Drury Lane; the following whimsical note refers to one of his consultations with Godwin on the matter:—

"[Dec. 4, 1800.]

"Dear Sir,—I send this speedily after the heels of Cooper (O! the dainty expression) to say that Mary is obliged to stay at home on Sunday to receive a female friend, from whom I am equally glad to escape. So that we shall be by ourselves. I write, because it may make *some* difference in your marketting, &c.

"C. L.

"Thursday Morning.

"I am sorry to put you to the expense of twopence postage. But I calculate thus: if Mary comes she will

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| eat Beef 2 plates, | . . | 4d. |
| *Batter Pudding* 1 do | . . . | 2d. |
| Beer, a pint, | . . . . . | 2d. |
| Wine, 3 glasses, | . . . | 11d. I drink no wine! |
| Chesnuts, after dinner, | . . | 2d. |
| Tea and supper at moderate calculation, | . . . . . | 9d. |
| | | 2s. 6d. |
| From which deduct | | 2d. postage. |
| | | 2s. 4d. |

You are a clear gainer by her not coming."

The first (and last) night of "Antonio" was December 13th, 1800. In the essay on the old actors, in the *London Magazine*, Lamb told for all time the history of that luckless performance. I quote the story. "I remember, too acutely for my peace, the deadly extinguisher which he [Kemble] put upon my friend G.'s 'Antonio.' G., satiate with visions of political justice (possibly not to be realised in our time), or willing to let the sceptical worldlings see, that his anticipations of the future did not preclude a warm sympathy for men as they are and have been—wrote a tragedy. He chose a story, affecting, romantic, Spanish—the plot simple, without being naked—the incidents uncommon, without being overstrained. Antonio, who gives the name to the piece, is a sensitive young Castilian, who, in a fit of his country honour, immolates his sister——

"But I must not anticipate the catastrophe—the play, reader, is extant in choice English—and you will employ a spare half crown not injudiciously in the quest of it.

"The conception was bold, and the dénouement—the time and place in which the hero of it existed, considered—not much out of keeping; yet it must be confessed, that it required a delicacy of handling both from the author and the performer, so as not much to shock the prejudices of a modern English audience. G., in my opinion, had done his part.

WILLIAM GODWIN (AGED 48)

FROM THE DRAWING BY LAWRENCE. ENGRAVED BY RIDLEY

"John, who was in familiar habits with the philosopher, had undertaken to play Antonio. Great expectations were formed. A philosopher's first play was a new era. The night arrived. I was favoured with a seat in an advantageous box, between the author and his friend M. [Marshall]. G. sate cheerful and confident. In his friend M.'s looks, who had perused the manuscript, I read some terror. Antonio in the person of John Philip Kemble at length appeared, starched out in a ruff which no one could dispute, and in most irreproachable mustachios. John always dressed most provokingly correct on these occasions. The first act swept by, solemn and silent. It went off, as G. assured M., exactly as the opening act of a piece—the protasis—should do. The cue of the spectators was to be mute. The characters were but in their introduction. The passions and the incidents would be developed hereafter. Applause hitherto would be impertinent. Silent attention was the effect all-desirable. Poor M. acquiesced —but in his honest friendly face I could discern a working which told how much more acceptable the plaudit of a single hand (however misplaced) would have been than all this reasoning.

"The second act (as in duty bound) rose a little in interest; but still John kept his forces under—in policy, as G. would have it—and the audience were most complacently attentive. The protasis, in fact, was scarcely unfolded. The interest would warm in the next act, against which a special incident was provided. M. wiped his cheek, flushed with a friendly perspiration —'tis M.'s way of showing his zeal—'from every pore of him a perfume falls—' I honour it above Alexander's. He had once or twice during this act joined his palms in a feeble endeavour to elicit a sound—they emitted a solitary noise without an echo—there was no deep to answer to his deep. G. repeatedly begged him to be quiet.

"The third act at length brought on the scene which was to warm the piece progressively to the final flaming forth of the catastrophe. A philosophic calm settled upon the clear brow of G. as it approached. The lips of M. quivered. A challenge was held forth upon the stage, and there was promise of a fight. The pit roused themselves on this extraordinary occasion, and, as their manner is, seemed disposed to make a ring,—when suddenly Antonio, who was the challenged, turning the tables upon the hot challenger, Don Gusman (who by the way should have

had his sister) baulks his humour, and the pit's reasonable expectation at the same time, with some speeches out of the new philosophy against duelling. The audience were here fairly caught—their courage was up, and on the alert—a few blows, *ding dong*, as R——s [Reynolds] the dramatist afterwards expressed it to me, might have done the business—when their most exquisite moral sense was suddenly called in to assist in the mortifying negation of their own pleasure. They could not applaud, for disappointment; they would not condemn, for morality's sake. The interest stood stone still; and John's manner was not at all calculated to unpetrify it. It was Christmas time, and the atmosphere furnished some pretext for asthmatic affections. One began to cough—his neighbour sympathised with him—till a cough became epidemical. But when, from being half-artificial in the pit, the cough got frightfully naturalised among the fictitious persons of the drama; and Antonio himself (albeit it was not set down in the stage directions) seemed more intent upon relieving his own lungs than the distresses of the author and his friends,—then G. 'first knew fear;' and, mildly turning to M., intimated that he had not been aware that Mr. Kemble laboured under a cold; and that the performance might possibly have been postponed with advantage for some nights further—still keeping the same serene countenance, while M. sweat like a bull.

"It would be invidious to pursue the fates of this ill-starred evening. In vain did the plot thicken in the scenes that followed, in vain the dialogue wax more passionate and stirring, and the progress of the sentiment point more and more clearly to the arduous developement which impended. In vain the action was accelerated, while the acting stood still. From the beginning John had taken his stand; had wound himself up to an even tenor of stately declamation, from which no exigence of dialogue or person could make him swerve for an instant. To dream of his rising with the scene (the common trick of tragedians) was preposterous; for from the onset he had planted himself, as upon a terrace, on an eminence vastly above the audience, and he kept that sublime level to the end. He looked from his throne of elevated sentiment upon the under-world of spectators with a most sovran and becoming contempt. There was excellent pathos delivered out to them: an they would receive it, so; an they

would not receive it, so. There was no offence against decorum in all this; nothing to condemn, to damn. Not an irreverent symptom of a sound was to be heard.

"The procession of verbiage stalked on through four and five acts, no one venturing to predict what would come of it, when towards the winding up of the latter, Antonio, with an irrelevancy that seemed to stagger Elvira herself—for she had been coolly arguing the point of honour with him—suddenly whips out a poniard, and stabs his sister to the heart. The effect was, as if a murder had been committed in cold blood. The whole house rose up in clamorous indignation demanding justice. The feeling rose far above hisses. I believe at that instant, if they could have got him, they would have torn the unfortunate author to pieces. Not that the act itself was so exorbitant, or of a complexion different from what they themselves would have applauded upon another occasion in a Brutus, or an Appius—but for want of attending to Antonio's *words*, which palpably led to the expectation of no less dire an event, instead of being seduced by his *manner*, which seemed to promise a sleep of a less alarming nature than it was his cue to inflict upon Elvira, they found themselves betrayed into an accompliceship of murder, a perfect misprision of parricide, while they dreamed of nothing less.

"M., I believe, was the only person who suffered acutely from the failure; for G. thenceforward, with a serenity unattainable but by the true philosophy, abandoning a precarious popularity, retired into his fast hold of speculation,—the drama in which the world was to be his tiring room, and remote posterity his applauding spectators at once, and actors."

Three days after the play's failure Lamb sent Manning a mischievous account of a visit to the disappointed author. "Calling in accidentally on the Professor while he was out, I was ushered into the study; and my nose quickly (most sagacious always) pointed me to four tokens lying loose upon thy table, Professor, which indicated thy violent and satanical pride of heart. Imprimis, there caught mine eye a list of six persons, thy friends, whom thou didst meditate inviting to a sumptuous dinner on the Thursday, anticipating the profits of thy Saturday's play to answer charges; I was in the honoured file! Next, a stronger evidence of thy violent and almost satanical

pride, lay a list of all the morning papers (from the 'Morning Chronicle' downwards to the 'Porcupine'), with the places of their respective offices, where thou wast meditating to insert, and didst insert, an elaborate sketch of the story of thy play—stones in thy enemy's hand to bruise thee with; and severely wast thou bruised, O Professor! nor do I know what oil to pour into thy wounds. Next, which convinced me to a dead conviction of thy pride, violent and almost satanical pride—lay a list of books, which thy un-tragedy-favoured pocket could never answer; Dodsley's Old Plays, Malone's Shakspeare (still harping upon thy play, thy philosophy abandoned meanwhile to Christians and superstitious minds); nay, I believe (if I can believe my memory), that the ambitious Encyclopædia itself was part of thy meditated acquisitions; but many a playbook was there. All these visions are *damned;* and thou, Professor, must read Shakspere in future out of a common edition; and, hark ye, pray read him to a little better purpose! Last and strongest against thee (in colours manifest as the hand upon Belshazzar's wall), lay a volume of poems by C. Lloyd and C. Lamb. Thy heart misgave thee, that thy assistant might possibly not have talent enough to furnish thee an epilogue!"

On December 27th a long-meditated visit to Manning at Cambridge is fixed for January 5th, 1801. "A word or two of my progress. Embark at six o'clock in the morning, with a fresh gale, on a Cambridge one-decker; very cold till eight at night; land at St. Mary's light-house, muffins and coffee upon table (or any other curious production of Turkey or both Indies), snipes exactly at nine, punch to commence at ten, with *argument;* difference of opinion is expected to take place about eleven; perfect unanimity, with some haziness and dimness, before twelve. —N.B. My single affection is not so singly wedded to snipes; but the curious and epicurean eye would also take a pleasure in beholding a delicate and well-chosen assortment of teals, ortolans, the unctuous and palate-soothing flesh of geese wild and tame, nightingales' brains, the sensorium of a young sucking-pig, or any other Christmas dish, which I leave to the judgment of you and the cook of Gonville."

At about the same time, or possibly a little earlier, Lamb sent Manning a copy of *John Woodvil*, which had now been definitely rejected, "compounded," as Manning had wished,

by the hands of the author and his sister. This copy, which differs very considerably from the version of the play which Lamb printed in 1802, is now in America; it will be found minutely described in the notes to the fifth volume of my edition of Lamb's works.

## CHAPTER XVII

### 1801

Correspondence with Wordsworth—The Northern Castigation—The Move to 16 Mitre Court Buildings—The *Albion*—John Fenwick—Robert Fell—Captain Jackson—Randal Norris—George Burnett—*Specimens of English Prose Writers*—Lamb's "Ragged Intimados."

THE first letter of 1801 brings us to the beginning of Lamb's correspondence with the Wordsworths. The poet, who was then living with his sister Dorothy at Dove Cottage, Grasmere, was at that time nearly thirty-one; Lamb was nearly twenty-six. Wordsworth had sent Lamb the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and with it an invitation to the Lakes; in his reply Lamb indulges in another eulogy of London, and remarks on the poems which he likes best, offering some exceedingly sound and delicate criticism. "I will mention one more [beauty]: the delicate and curious feeling in the wish for the Cumberland Beggar, that he may have about him the melody of Birds, altho' he hear them not. Here the mind knowingly passes a fiction upon herself, first substituting her own feelings for the Beggar's, and, in the same breath detecting the fallacy, will not part with the wish.—The Poet's Epitaph is disfigured, to my taste, by the vulgar satire upon parsons and lawyers in the beginning, and the coarse epithet of pin point in the 6th stanza.[1] All the rest is eminently good, and your own.

[1] A Lawyer art thou?—draw not nigh;
Go, carry to some other place
The hardness of thy coward eye,
The falsehood of thy sallow face.

. . . . . .

Wrapp'd closely in thy sensual fleece
O turn aside, and take, I pray,
That he below may rest in peace,
Thy pin-point of a soul away!

I will just add that it appears to me a fault in the Beggar, that the instructions conveyed in it are too direct and like a lecture: they don't slide into the mind of the reader, while he is imagining no such matter." Finally Lamb defends "The Ancient Mariner" against some strictures passed upon it by Wordsworth in the preface. The letter as a whole has perhaps a slight tone of reserve, the secret of which is perhaps to be found in the sarcastic postscript, "Thank you for Liking my Play!!" —for Lamb had sent the Wordsworths a holograph copy of *John Woodvil* many months before, and had only just received tidings of it, in the shape of a chill and formal approval.

Lamb's famous letter to Manning of February 15th indicates the result of his strictures among the Lakes. "I had need be cautious henceforward what opinion I give of the 'Lyrical Ballads.' All the North of England are in a turmoil. Cumberland and Westmoreland have already declared a state of war. I lately received from Wordsworth a copy of the second volume, accompanied by an acknowledgement of having received from me many months since a copy of a certain Tragedy, with excuses for not having made any acknowledgement sooner, it being owing to an 'almost insurmountable aversion from Letter-writing.' This letter I answered in due form and time, and enumerated several of the passages which had most affected me, adding, unfortunately, that no single piece had moved me so forcibly as the 'Ancient Mariner,' 'The Mad Mother,' or the 'Lines at Tintern Abbey.' The Post did not sleep a moment. I received almost instantaneously a long letter of four sweating pages from my Reluctant Letter-Writer, the purport of which was, that he was sorry his 2d vol. had not given me more pleasure (Devil a hint did I give that it had *not pleased me*), and 'was compelled to wish that my range of sensibility was more extended, being obliged to believe that I should receive large influxes of happiness and happy Thoughts.' . . ."

Lamb then gives the two extracts which Wordsworth had particularly wished him to admire as representing "a certain Union of Tenderness and Imagination, which in the sense he used Imagination was not the characteristic of Shakspeare, but which Milton possessed in a degree far exceeding other Poets: which Union, as the highest species of Poetry, and chiefly deserving

that name, 'He was most proud to aspire to.'" Lamb adds: "You see both these are good Poetry: but after one has been reading Shakspeare twenty of the best years of one's life, to have a fellow start up, and prate about some unknown quality, which Shakspeare possessed in a degree inferior to Milton and *somebody else!!*

"This was not to be *all* my castigation. Coleridge, who had not written to me some months before, starts up from his bed of sickness to reprove me for my hardy presumption: four long pages, equally sweaty and more tedious, came from him; assuring me that, when the works of a man of true genius such as W. undoubtedly was, do not please me at first sight, I should suspect the fault to lie 'in me and not in them,' etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. What am I to do with such people? I certainly shall write them a very merry Letter." It is bitter to think that Lamb's very merry letter has vanished. The Lamb-Wordsworth correspondence, which continued to the end, is, however, of the highest interest without it; and although henceforward neither writer was to be offended, Wordsworth again and again drew from Lamb not perhaps his merriest thoughts but some quite merry and free ones.

In February Lamb tells Manning that he is going to change his lodgings: in April he has done so. "I live at No. 16 Mitre-court Buildings, a pistol-shot off Baron Maseres'. . . . When you come to see me, mount up to the top of the stairs—I hope you are not asthmatical—and come in flannel, for it's pure airy up there. And bring your glass, and I will shew you the Surrey Hills. My bed faces the river so as by perking up upon my haunches, and supporting my carcase with my elbows, without much wrying my neck, I can see the white sails glide by the bottom of the King's Bench walks as I lie in my bed. An excellent tiptoe prospect in the best room: casement windows with small panes, to look more like a cottage. Mind, I have got no bed for you, that's flat; sold it to pay expenses of moving. The very bed on which Manning lay—the friendly, the mathematical Manning!" Mitre Court Buildings, which have since been rebuilt, were Charles and Mary Lamb's first home in the Temple, on their return to it after an absence of nine years. They were destined not to leave it again until sixteen years had passed.

It must have been about this time that Lamb joined his friend John Fenwick on the *Albion*, an anti-ministerial weekly paper of which all trace has vanished. He has told the story of the *Albion* in the *Elia* essay on Newspapers. "Here [at the office of the paper] in murky closet, inadequate from its square contents to the receipt of the two bodies of Editor, and humble paragraph-maker, together at one time, sat in the discharge of his new Editorial functions (the 'Bigod' of Elia) the redoubted John Fenwick.

"F., without a guinea in his pocket, and having left not many in the pockets of his friends whom he might command, had purchased (on tick doubtless) the whole and sole Editorship, Proprietorship, with all the rights and titles (such as they were worth) of the Albion, from one Lovell; of whom we know nothing, save that he had stood in the pillory for a libel on the Prince of Wales. With this hopeless concern—for it had been sinking ever since its commencement, and could now reckon upon not more than a hundred subscribers—F. resolutely determined upon pulling down the Government in the first instance, and making both our fortunes by way of corollary. For seven weeks and more did this infatuated Democrat go about borrowing seven shilling pieces, and lesser coin, to meet the daily demands of the Stamp Office, which allowed no credit to publications of that side in politics. An outcast from politer bread, we attached our small talents to the forlorn fortunes of our friend. Our occupation now was to write treason.

"Recollections of feelings—which were all that now remained from our first boyish heats kindled by the French Revolution, when if we were misled, we erred in the company of some, who are accounted very good men now—rather than any tendency at this time to Republican doctrines—assisted us in assuming a style of writing, while the paper lasted, consonant in no very under-tone to the right earnest fanaticism of F. Our cue was now to insinuate, rather than recommend, possible abdications. Blocks, axes, Whitehall tribunals, were covered with flowers of so cunning a periphrasis—as Mr. Bayes says, never naming the *thing* directly—that the keen eye of an Attorney General was insufficient to detect the lurking snake among them."

A letter to Manning in the summer of 1801 completes the story. "For me, nothing new has happened to me, unless that

the poor 'Albion' died last Saturday of the world's neglect, and with it the fountain of my puns is choked up for ever. . . .

"I will close my letter of simple inquiry with an epigram on Mackintosh, the 'Vindiciæ Gallicæ'-man—who has got a place at last—one of the last I *did* for the 'Albion':—

> Though thou'rt like Judas, an apostate black,
> In the resemblance one thing thou dost lack;
> When he had gotten his ill-purchas'd pelf,
> He went away, and wisely hanged himself:
> This thou may do at last, yet much I doubt,
> If thou hast any *Bowels* to gush out!"

Of Fenwick we know little beyond occasional references in Lamb and Godwin's letters, the passage I have quoted, and the character sketch in the *Elia* essay "The Two Races of Man," where he is thus described under the name of Bigod. "Early in life he found himself invested with ample revenues; which, with that noble disinterestedness which I have noticed as inherent in men of the *great race*, he took almost immediate measures entirely to dissipate and bring to nothing: for there is something revolting in the idea of a king holding a private purse; and the thoughts of Bigod were all regal. Thus furnished, by the very act of disfurnishment; getting rid of the cumbersome luggage of riches, more apt (as one sings)

> To slacken virtue, and abate her edge,
> Than prompt her to do aught may merit praise,

he set forth, like some Alexander, upon his great enterprise, 'borrowing and to borrow!'

"In his periegesis, or triumphant progress throughout this island, it has been calculated that he laid a tythe part of the inhabitants under contribution. I reject this estimate as greatly exaggerated:—but having had the honour of accompanying my friend, divers times, in his perambulations about this vast city, I own I was greatly struck at first with the prodigious number of faces we met, who claimed a sort of respectful acquaintance with us. He was one day so obliging as to explain the phenomenon. It seems, these were his tributaries; feeders of his exchequer; gentlemen, his good friends (as he was pleased to express himself), to whom he had occasionally been beholden for a loan. Their multitudes did no way disconcert him. He

rather took a pride in numbering them; and, with Comus, seemed pleased to be 'stocked with so fair a herd.'

"With such sources, it was a wonder how he contrived to keep his treasury always empty. He did it by force of an aphorism, which he had often in his mouth, that 'money kept longer than three days stinks.' So he made use of it while it was fresh. A good part he drank away (for he was an excellent toss-pot), some he gave away, the rest he threw away, literally tossing and hurling it violently from him—as boys do burrs, or as if it had been infectious,—into ponds, or ditches, or deep holes,—inscrutable cavities of the earth;—or he would bury it (where he would never seek it again) by a river's side under some bank, which (he would facetiously observe) paid no interest—but out away from him it must go peremptorily, as Hagar's offspring into the wilderness, while it was sweet. He never missed it. The streams were perennial which fed his fisc. When new supplies became necessary, the first person that had the felicity to fall in with him, friend or stranger, was sure to contribute to the deficiency. For Bigod had an *undeniable* way with him. He had a cheerful, open exterior, a quick jovial eye, a bald forehead, just touched with grey (*cana fides*). He anticipated no excuse, and found none. And, waiving for a while my theory as to the *great race*, I would put it to the most untheorising reader, who may at times have disposable coin in his pocket, whether it is not more repugnant to the kindliness of his nature to refuse such a one as I am describing, than to say *no* to a poor petitionary rogue (your bastard borrower), who, by his mumping visnomy, tells you, that he expects nothing better; and, therefore, whose preconceived notions and expectations you do in reality so much less shock in the refusal.

"When I think of this man; his fiery glow of heart; his swell of feeling; how magnificent, how *ideal* he was; how great at the midnight hour; and when I compare with him the companions with whom I have associated since, I grudge the saving of a few idle ducats, and think that I am fallen into the society of *lenders*, and *little men*."

John Fenwick was brought into Lamb's circle by Godwin, who knew many odd people. Mrs. Fenwick, who was the author of a novel called *Secrecy*, had been a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, whom she nursed at her death. Fenwick himself

wrote a farce called "The Indian," produced at Drury Lane in October, 1800, and he translated the memoirs of General Duperrier Dumouriez. Of his life subsequent to the *Albion* period we know very little except that it was punctuated by bankruptcy; that he followed the *Albion* with a paper called the *Plough*, of which all trace (as of the *Albion*) seems to have vanished; that he was at one time later editor of the *Statesman;* that in 1817, writing to Barron Field in Australia, Lamb refers to him as "a very old, honest friend of mine;" and that at some period he settled in America or Canada. He died in 1820.

Another of Lamb's occasional companions at this time was Fell, but of him we know even less than of Fenwick. The two books which I assume to be his have only R. Fell on the title page: *A Tour through the Batavian Republic*, 1801, and *Memories of the Public Life of Charles James Fox*, 1808. We may guess Fell to have been an amusing and very thirsty person. His peccadilloes seem to have been of a more serious nature than those of Fenwick, since Newgate is once hinted at as his home, whereas Fenwick drew the line at the Fleet or King's Bench. Fell also came to Lamb through Godwin.

Southey records in one of his letters that Lamb and Fell were once at Godwin's when the Philosopher committed the discourtesy of falling asleep: they therefore "carried off his rum, brandy, sugar, picked his pockets of every thing, and made off in triumph."

If, as I am constrained to believe, the "Confessions of a Drunkard," an essay written by Lamb in 1813, had many true statements in it, we may feel assured that neither Fenwick nor Fell did him much good. "Twelve years ago," he wrote, "I had completed my six and twentieth year. I had lived from the period of leaving school to that time pretty much in solitude. My companions were chiefly books, or at most one or two living ones of my own book-loving and sober stamp. I rose early, went to bed betimes, and the faculties which God had given me, I have reason to think, did not rust in me unused. About that time I fell in with some companions of a different order. They were men of boisterous spirits, sitters up a-nights, disputants, drunken; yet seemed to have something noble about them. We dealt about the wit, or what passes for it after midnight,

jovially. Of the quality called fancy I certainly possessed a larger share than my companions. Encouraged by their applause, I set up for a profest joker!"

Lamb's age in 1801—twenty-six—his intercourse with these careless journalists, the description of what he was before their day, all suggest the truth of this part of the Confessions. Whether, as he goes on to say (as we shall see later), the constant strain of trying to say brilliant things drove him to stimulants until he was enslaved by them, is another matter. There, I think, he exaggerated: depicting only what might have been, had he had no home responsibilities, and no position in a public office, to impress wisdom upon him. But of that more in its true place.

In Fenwick we may see an anticipatory Micawber, with a touch of Falstaff combined. But to get Lamb's contributions to the construction of Wilkins Micawber complete, we must add another of his friends of the same period, "Captain Jackson." We know nothing of Captain Jackson beyond what Lamb tells us in the *Last Essays of Elia*—not even his real name—but that Lamb did not invent but portray I feel convinced. The essay appeared in 1824, at which time Lamb remarks that some five and twenty years earlier (i.e., *circa* 1800) the Captain was his "dear old friend." I quote largely from this genial essay, not only to have another of Lamb's friends in his right place in the Life, but also to accumulate evidence as to the similarity of Lamb and Dickens in their fancy for the Micawber type. Add Captain Jackson to Ralph Bigod (with a touch of Coleridge's grandiloquence) and you have Micawber complete.

"The Captain was a retired half-pay officer, with a wife and two grown-up daughters, whom he maintained with the port and notions of gentlewomen upon that slender professional allowance. Comely girls they were too.

"And was I in danger of forgetting this man?—his cheerful suppers—the noble tone of hospitality, when first you set your foot in *the cottage*—the anxious ministerings about you, where little or nothing (God knows) was to be ministered.—Althea's horn in a poor platter—the power of self-enchantment, by which, in his magnificent wishes to entertain you, he multiplied his means to bounties.

"You saw with your bodily eyes indeed what seemed a bare

scrag—cold savings from the foregone meal—remnant hardly sufficient to send a mendicant from the door contented. But in the copious will—the revelling imagination of your host—the 'mind, the mind, Master Shallow,' whole beeves were spread before you—hecatombs—no end appeared to the profusion.

"It was the widow's cruse—the loaves and fishes; carving could not lessen nor helping diminish it—the stamina were left—the elemental bone still flourished, divested of its accidents.

"'Let us live while we can,' methinks I hear the open-handed creature exclaim; 'while we have, let us not want,' 'here is plenty left;' 'want for nothing'—with many more such hospitable sayings, the spurs of appetite, and old concomitants of smoaking boards, and feast-oppressed chargers. Then sliding a slender ratio of Single Gloucester upon his wife's plate, or the daughter's, he would convey the remanent rind into his own, with a merry quirk of 'the nearer the bone,' &c., and declaring that he universally preferred the outside. For we had our table distinctions, you are to know, and some of us in a manner sate above the salt. None but his guest or guests dreamed of tasting flesh luxuries at night, the fragments were *verè hospitibus sacra*. But of one thing or another there was always enough, and leavings: only he would sometimes finish the remainder crust, to show that he wished no savings.

"Wine he had none; nor, except on very rare occasions, spirits; but the sensation of wine was there. Some thin kind of ale I remember—'British beverage,' he would say! 'Push about, my boys;' 'Drink to your sweethearts, girls.' At every meagre draught a toast must ensue, or a song. All the forms of good liquor were there, with none of the effects wanting. Shut your eyes, and you would swear a capacious bowl of punch was foaming in the centre, with beams of generous Port or Madeira radiating to it from each of the table corners. You got flustered, without knowing whence; tipsy upon words; and reeled under the potency of his unperforming Bacchanalian encouragements.

"We had our songs—'Why, Soldiers, Why'—and the 'British Grenadiers'—in which last we were all obliged to bear chorus. Both the daughters sang. Their proficiency was a nightly theme—the masters he had given them—the 'no-expence' which he spared to accomplish them in a science 'so necessary to young

women.' But then—they could not sing 'without the instrument.' . . .

"He was a juggler, who threw mists before your eyes—you had no time to detect his fallacies. He would say 'hand me the *silver* sugar tongs;' and, before you could discover it was a single spoon, and that *plated*, he would disturb and captivate your imagination by a misnomer of 'the urn' for a tea kettle; or by calling a homely bench a sofa. Rich men direct you to their furniture, poor ones divert you from it; he neither did one nor the other, but by simply assuming that everything was handsome about him, you were positively at a demur what you did, or did not see, at *the cottage*. With nothing to live on, he seemed to live on everything. He had a stock of wealth in his mind; not that which is properly termed *Content*, for in truth he was not to be *contained* at all, but overflowed all bounds by the force of a magnificent self-delusion.

"Enthusiasm is catching; and even his wife, a sober native of North Britain, who generally saw things more as they were, was not proof against the continual collision of his credulity. Her daughters were rational and discreet young women; in the main, perhaps, not insensible to their true circumstances. I have seen them assume a thoughtful air at times. But such was the preponderating opulence of his fancy, that I am persuaded, not for any half hour together, did they ever look their own prospects fairly in the face. There was no resisting the vortex of his temperament. His riotous imagination conjured up handsome settlements before their eyes, which kept them up in the eye of the world too, and seem at last to have realised themselves; for they both have married since, I am told, more than respectably."

The late Canon Ainger suggested that Captain Jackson was to some extent a composite portrait, to which the Lambs' friend Randal Norris, Sub-Treasurer of the Inner Temple, contributed a few traits. But personally I prefer to think of the Captain as a separate character. Here, however, might perhaps more fittingly be quoted part of Lamb's letter to Crabb Robinson (afterwards printed as "A Death-Bed"), written in 1827 on the occasion of Norris's death; because the impressions of Norris there recorded were gathered principally, I imagine, in these earlier days, and there is no record of much intimacy between the Lambs and the Norrises later, kindly as their thoughts of each other must

always have been. It will help to complete the picture of Lamb's several very different friends at the beginning of the century and of his maturer life.

"In him [Lamb wrote, as Norris lay dead] I have a loss the world cannot make up. He was my friend, and my father's friend, for all the life that I can remember. I seem to have made foolish friendships since. Those are the friendships, which outlast a second generation. Old as I am getting, in his eyes I was still the child he knew me. To the last he called me Charley. I have none to call me Charley now. He was the last link that bound me to the Temple. . . . In him I seem to have lost the old plainness of manners and singleness of heart. Lettered he was not; his reading scarcely exceeded the Obituary of the old Gentleman's Magazine, to which he has never failed of having recourse for these last fifty years. Yet there was the pride of literature about him from that slender perusal; and moreover from his office of archive-keeper to your ancient city, in which he must needs pick up some equivocal Latin; which, among his less literary friends, assumed the air of a very pleasant pedantry. Can I forget the erudite look with which, having tried to puzzle out the text of a Black lettered Chaucer in your Corporation Library, to which he was a sort of Librarian, he gave it up with this consolatary reflection—'Charley,' said he, 'I do not know what you find in these very old books, but I observe, there is a deal of very indifferent spelling in them.' His jokes (for he had some) are ended; but they were old Perennials, staple, and always as good as new. He had one Song, that spake of the 'flat bottoms of our foes coming over in darkness,' and alluded to a threatened Invasion, many years since blown over; this he reserved to be sung on Christmas Night, which we always passed with him, and he sang it with the freshness of an impending event. How his eyes would sparkle when he came to the passage:—

> 'We'll still make 'em run, and we'll still make 'em sweat,
> In spite of the devil and Brussels' Gazette!'"

Randal Norris, whose parents were Kentish people, was articled to Mr. Walls of Paper Buildings at the age of fourteen, and he lived in the Temple ever after and was buried there. Mrs. Norris, *née* Faint, was born at Widford, and was a friend of Mrs. Field. Mary Lamb was a bridesmaid at their wedding.

One other of Lamb's early acquaintances may be here introduced and—since he never was so intimate or remarkable as to enter into the woof and warp of his life—dismissed. This was the unfortunate George Burnett. Burnett was born probably in 1776. He met Southey at Balliol, was introduced by him to Coleridge in 1794, and it was he who with Coleridge "talked" Pantisocracy "into shape." The Rev. Cuthbert Southey writes thus of Burnett in Southey's *Life and Letters*. "Among my father's college friends, and as forming one of the enthusiastic party who were to have formed a 'model republic' on the bank of the Susquehannah, has been mentioned George Burnett, who, of all the number, suffered most permanently from having taken up those visionary views. He had intended to enter the Church of England, and, had he not been tempted to quit the beaten track, would probably have become a steady, conscientious, and useful clergyman. Carried away by the influence chiefly of my father and Mr. Coleridge, he imbibed first their political and then their religious opinions; and thus, being led to abandon the intention with which he had entered Oxford, he became so completely unsettled as to render his short life a series of unsuccessful attempts in many professions. Much of this was indeed, owing to the vacillating character of his mind; but it was not the less through life a subject of regret to my father, not unmixed with self-reproach.

"At the present time [1798] he was minister to a Unitarian congregation at Yarmouth; whither my father now went for a short visit, having the additional motive of seeing his brother Henry, whom, some time previously, he had placed with Burnett as a private pupil. Through Burnett's means he was now introduced to William Taylor, of Norwich."

Burnett, who seems to have been an utterly ill-balanced, feckless and decadent character, made many experiments. Like Charles Lloyd, he studied medicine at Edinburgh; like George Dyer, he was tutor to the sons of "Citizen" Stanhope; like Robert Allen, he became an army surgeon. He also lived for a while in a Polish family. But he was nothing long. Lamb's letter to Rickman concerning Dyer (at the end of 1801), from which I have quoted on page 151, shows Burnett as a hack in bondage to the famous Richard Phillips, the publisher of the *Monthly Magazine* and a host of other periodicals and books.

Herein Lamb's G. B. was like another and more famous G. B. of later date; but poor Burnett has left us no *Lavengro* with a scathing portrait of his employer in it, as George Borrow did.

Lamb writes thus of Burnett in the Rickman letter: "I promised Burnet to write when his parcel went. He wants me to certify that he is more awake than you think him. I believe he may be by this time, but he is so full of self-opinion that I fear whether he and Phillips will ever do together. What he is to do for Phillips he whimsically seems to consider more as a favor done *to* P. than a job *from* P. He still persists to call employment *dependence* and prates about the insolence of booksellers and the tax upon geniusses. Poor devil! he is not launched upon the ocean and is sea-sick with aforethought. I write plainly about him, and he would stare and yawn finely if he read this treacherous epistle, but I really am anxious about him, and that [? it] nettles me to see him so proud and so helpless. If he is not serv'd he will never serve himself. I read his long letter to Southey, which I suppose you have seen. He had better have been furnishing copy for Phillips than luxuriating in tracing the causes of his imbecillity. I believe he is a little wrong in not ascribing more to the structure of his own mind. He had his yawns from nature, his pride from education.

"I hope to see Southey soon, so I need only send my remembrance to him now. Doubtless I need not tell him that Burnett is not to be foster'd in self-opinion. His eyes want opening to see himself a man of middling stature. I am not oculist enough to do this. The booksellers may one day remove the film. I am all this time on the most cordial supping terms of amity with G. Burnett and really love him at times: but I must speak freely of people behind their backs and not think it back-biting. It is better than Godwin's way of telling a man he is a fool to his face.

"I think if you could do any thing for George in the way of an office (God knows whether you can in any haste, but you did talk of it) it is my firm belief that it would be his *only chance* of settlement; he will never live by his *literary exertions*, as he calls them—he is too proud to go the usual way to work and he has no talents to make that way unnecessary. I know he talks big in his letter to Southey that his mind is undergoing an alteration and that the die is now casting that shall consign him

to honor or dishonour, but these expressions are the convulsions of a fever, not the sober workings of health. Translated into plain English he now and then perceives he must work or starve, and then he thinks he'll work; but when he goes about it there's a lion in the way. He came dawdling to me for an Encyclopædia yesterday. I recommended him to Norris' library and he said if he could not get it there Phillips was bound to furnish him with one. It was Phillips' interest to do so and all that. This was true with some restrictions—but as to Phillips' interests to oblige G. B.! Lord help his simple head! P. could by a *whistle* call together a host of such authors as G. B. like Robin Hood's merry men in green. P. has regular regiments in pay. Poor writers are his crab-lice and suck at him for nutriment. His round pudding chops are their *idea* of plenty when *in their idle fancies they aspire to be rich.*"

We get glimpses of Burnett's after career in the letters from Lamb to Rickman which were recently made public by Canon Ainger. Rickman continued his friend, in spite of Burnett's very unsatisfactory return for assistance. It was in 1802 that he became tutor to the sons of "Citizen" Stanhope, the revolutionary earl. But his pupils ran away and the engagement soon ceased. Later, he entered the militia as a surgeon, and on giving this up, left for Poland in some teaching capacity. In 1806 he was, however, back again, for, writing to Sarah Stoddart in April, Mary Lamb says: "Your friend George Burnett calls as usual, for Charles to *point out something for him.*"

The passage means that Burnett was then busy on his *Specimens of English Prose-Writers to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, and that Lamb was helping him in his selections. I fancy that now and then Lamb did more: some of the critical epithets suggest his taste quite as much as the extracts, as for example, when it is said of Sir Thomas Browne that he "delighted to live in the conjectural world, and lived in it so long, that conjectures and things impossible to be known, assumed the place of realities and things knowable;" or of Izaak Walton, that the morality of his book is "pure and peaceful as the lake on which the angler silently awaits his quiet prey;" or of Jeremy Taylor, that "his similes, indeed, are often crowded, and the general effect is dissipated and weakened by a redundance of beauties," but that "no writer can exceed him in

sentimental painting — in awful representation." Lamb's *Dramatic Specimens* were in the nature of a companion to Burnett's book, just as Burnett's *Specimens of Prose* were suggested by George Ellis's *Specimens of the Early English Poets.* All were published by Longmans.

Burnett, as we shall see, died miserably in 1811.

Young though he was—only twenty-six—Lamb had already as interesting and varied a band of friends as perhaps any man in England. Coleridge and Manning, Wordsworth and Dorothy Wordsworth, Southey and Captain Jackson, George Dyer and John Rickman, Burnett and James White, Fenwick and Charles Lloyd, Godwin and Fell—these are diverse enough. "He chose his companions," Lamb was to write of himself many years later, "for some individuality of character which they manifested. Hence, not many persons of science, and few professed *literati*, were of his councils. They were, for the most part, persons of an uncertain fortune; and, as to such people commonly nothing is more obnoxious than a gentleman of settled (though moderate) income, he passed with most of them for a great miser. To my knowledge this was a mistake. His *intimados*, to confess a truth, were in the world's eye a ragged regiment. He found them floating on the surface of society; and the colour, or something else, in the weed pleased him. The burrs stuck to him—but they were good and loving burrs for all that. He never greatly cared for the society of what are called good people. If any of these were scandalised (and offences were sure to arise), he could not help it." So early we see the tendencies thus described beginning to assert themselves.

We may resume the story of 1801 with a quotation from a letter to Walter Wilson (an India House clerk, and afterwards the biographer of Defoe) in which Lamb apologises for some unknown prank at Richmond. It is an interesting note, because it states very clearly and honestly his state of mind at that time: "I know that you think a very important difference in opinion with respect to some more serious subjects between us makes me a dangerous companion; but do not rashly infer, from some slight and light expressions which I may have made use of in a moment of levity in your presence, without sufficient regard to your feelings —do not conclude that I am an inveterate enemy to all religion. I have had a time of seriousness, and I have known the importance

and reality of a religious belief. Latterly, I acknowledge, much of my seriousness has gone off, whether from new company or some other new associations; but I still retain at bottom a conviction of the truth, and a certainty of the usefulness, of religion. I will not pretend to more gravity or feeling than I at present possess; my intention is not to persuade you that any great alteration is probable in me; sudden converts are superficial and transitory; I only want you to believe that I have *stamina* of seriousness within me, and that I desire nothing more than a return of that friendly intercourse which used to subsist between us, but which my folly has suspended."

Lamb never again wrote much of religion, nor, so far as I can discover, practised religious forms. He was sufficiently occupied in doing his duty.

Of 1801 there is little more to tell. A communication to Godwin in September, concerning his new play "Faulkener," which was not, however, performed until 1807, informs us that Lamb was staying at Margate in that month, almost certainly with his sister. In this year also a German edition of *Rosamund Gray* was published; but there is no mention of it in Lamb's letters. It is possible that the translation had been made upon the advice of Coleridge or Wordsworth, in Germany.

In a letter to Rickman on September 16th, 1801, we meet yet another acquaintance who, however antipathetic, was destined to bring about some of the Lambs' most charming work. "I know no more news from here, except that the Professor (Godwin) is COURTING. The Lady is a Widow with green spectacles and one child, and the Professor is grown quite juvenile. He bows when he is spoke to, and smiles without occasion, and wriggles as fantastically as Malvolio, and has more affectation than a canary bird pluming his feathers, when he thinks somebody looks at him. He lays down his spectacles, as if in scorn, and takes 'em up again from necessity, and winks that she mayn't see he gets sleepy about eleven o'Clock. You never saw such a philosophic coxcomb, nor any one play the Romeo so unnaturally."

Godwin married in December, 1801, the lady being Mrs. Clairmont, a widow, and the mother of Byron's Jane Clairmont. She quickly turned out to be, as Lamb told Manning a little later, a disagreeable woman, "so much so as to drive me and some more old cronies from his house." Lamb and Mrs. Godwin

seem never to have liked each other, as we learn from remarks in the letters and also from a little character sketch of her which he contributed over the signature "Lepus" to the *New Times* in 1825; but it must not be forgotten that had she not insisted upon becoming a publisher of books for children—to help out the precarious Godwin finances—those exquisite things, Charles Lamb's story of "The Sea Voyage" and Mary Lamb's story of "The Sailor Uncle" (in *Mrs. Leicester's School*) might have remained unwritten.

Lepus (the hare with too many friends) thus describes Godwin's second helpmate: "Mrs. Priscilla Pry must not only know all about your private concerns, but be as deeply concerned herself for them: she will pluck at the very heart of your mystery. She must anatomise and skin you, absolutely lay your feelings bare. Her passions are reducible to two, but those are stronger in her than in any human creature—*pity* and *envy*. I will try to illustrate it. She has intimacy with two families—the Grimstones and the Gubbins's. The former are sadly pinched to live, the latter are in splendid circumstances: the former tenant an obscure third floor in Devereux Court, the latter occupy a stately mansion in May-fair. I have accompanied her to both these domiciles. She will burst into the incommodious lodging of poor Grimstone and his wife at some unseasonable hour, when they are at their meagre dinner, with a 'Bless me! what a dark passage you have! I could hardly find my way up stairs! Isn't there a drain somewhere? Well, I like to see you at your *little* bit of mutton!' But her treat is to catch them at a meal of solitary potatoes. Then does her sympathy burgeon, and bud out into a thousand flowers of rhetorical pity and wonder; and it is trumpeted out afterwards to all her acquaintance, that the poor Grimstones were 'making a dinner without flesh yesterday.' The word *poor* is her favourite; the word (on my conscience) is endeared to her beyond any monosyllable in the language. Poverty, in the tone of her compassion, is somehow doubled; it is emphatically what a dramatist, with some licence, has called *poor poverty*. It is stark-naked *indigence*, and never in her mind connected with any mitigating circumstances of self-respect and independence in the owner, which give to poverty a dignity. It is an object of pure pity, and nothing else.

"This is her first way. Change we the scene to May-fair and

the Gubbins's. Suppose it a morning call :—'Bless me!—(for she equally blesses herself against want and abundance)—what a style you *do* live in! what elegant curtains! You must have a great income to afford all these things. I wonder you can ever visit such poor folks as we!'—with more to the same purpose, which I must cut short, not to be tedious. She pumps all her friends to know the exact income of all her friends. Such a one must have a great salary. Do you think he has as much as eight hundred a year—seven hundred and fifty perhaps? A wag once told her I had fourteen hundred—(Heaven knows we Bank Clerks, though with no reason to complain, in few cases realise that luxury)—and the fury of her wonder, till I undeceived her, nearly worked her spirits to a fever. Now Pry is equally glad to get at his friends' circumstances; but his curiosity is disinterested, as I said, and passionless. No emotions are consequent upon the satisfaction of it. He is a philosopher who loves knowledge for its own sake; she is not content with a *lumen siccum* (dry knowledge, says Bacon, is best); the success of her researches is nothing, but as it feeds the two main springs between which her soul is kept in perpetual conflict—Pity and Envy." There is not the slightest doubt that Mrs. Godwin sat for this portrait; but it must not be assumed, I think, that Lamb went to Godwin for its companion "Tom Pry," although he may have suggested a few traits. The original of Tom Pry was, I believe, Tommy Hill, the drysalter, whose inquisitiveness was a byword.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### LAMB AS JOURNALIST

### 1801-1804

WE have seen Lamb attempting to get work on the *Morning Post* and failing; we have seen him on the *Albion*, lampooning the Government and at last putting an end to the paper, in August, 1801, by a too caustic epigram. Nowise daunted he made other efforts to add a journalist's pickings to his India House salary, and between 1801 and 1804, with long periods of inactivity, he occasionally succeeded. In the present chapter I shall endeavour to tell the story of these efforts.

Writing to Manning on August 31st, 1801, Lamb says that he has a sort of opening to the *Morning Chronicle*, then edited by James Perry. "I shall have a difficult job to manage, for you must know that Mister Perry, in common with the great body of the Whigs, thinks 'The Albion' *very low*. I find I must rise a peg or so, be a little more decent and less abusive; for, to confess the truth, I had arrived to an abominable pitch; I spared neither age nor sex when my cue was given me."

Lamb also mentions that Rickman has gone to Ireland, where he had the post of Deputy-Keeper of the Privy Seal in addition to his duties as private secretary to Abbot, the Chief Secretary. One of Rickman's first actions was to induce Southey to accept a sinecure in Dublin. In a letter from Southey at Dublin to Coleridge, dated October 16th, we have news of Lamb's journalism. "From Lamb's letter to Rickman I learn that he means to print his play, which is the lukewarm John [Woodvil], whose plan is as obnoxious to Rickman as it was to you and me; and that he has been writing for the *Albion*, and now writes for the *Morning Chronicle*, where more than two-thirds of his materials are superciliously rejected. Stuart (of the *Morning Post*) would use him more kindly. Godwin having had a second tragedy

rejected, has filched a story from one of De Foe's novels for a third, and begged hints of Lamb." A consultation of the file of the *Chronicle* from August to December, 1801, yields little that can positively be attributed to Lamb, but he was probably the author of a long would-be comic letter on Horns, signed Cornuto, on August 5th, and possibly of a similar contribution on Crim. Con. on August 11th. Here and there a paragraph also seems to suggest his hand; but his connection with the paper was, I imagine, very brief.

Lamb's own account of his journalistic adventures at this period of his life is very misleading, but I have, I think, tracked his pen. In the *Elia* essay on newspapers he says that he passed from the *Morning Post* to the *Albion;* but there is no doubt that his memory here played him false. We have seen him trying Stuart with specimens of his work, to no purpose. There is unquestionable evidence (in the letters to Rickman, recently published by Canon Ainger) that his first regular contributions to the *Morning Post*, under Stuart, were at the beginning of 1802, when he was permitted to write a few dramatic criticisms and paragraphs. The only dramatic articles that can be absolutely identified are those on G. F. Cooke, as Richard III. and Lear (printed in Vol. I. of my edition of Lamb's works), which appeared on January 4th and 9th, 1802. Stuart, it seems, required the notice of a play to be printed the next morning, and Lamb was not able to work so hurriedly as to make compliance possible. Two other short articles, non-theatrical in subject, we can identify as Lamb's either from internal or external evidence: the comic description of the Lord Mayor's State bed, on January 4th, and the fable for Twelfth Night (an anticipation by twenty years of the "Rejoicings on the New Year's Coming of Age"), on January 6th. He also contributed on January 6th the comic poem "Dick Strype," signed Timothy Bramble. On February 1st came the essay "The Londoner," which marked the end of Lamb's association with Daniel Stuart. Writing many years afterwards, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1838, concerning Coleridge's work for the *Morning Post*, Stuart said, "But as for poor Charles Lamb, I never could make anything of him."

In a letter to Rickman on January 14th, 1802, Lamb admits that he and Stuart are not likely to get on and he says that for the most part he will now contribute only paragraphs. "I

beg you not to read with much expectation, for my poor paragraphs do only get in when there are none of any body's else. Most of them are rejected; all, almost, that are *personal*, where my forte lies. And I cannot get at once out of the delightful regions of scurrility, the 'Delectable Mountains' of *Albion* where whilom I fed my sheep, unto the kickshaws of fashionable tittle-tattle, which I *must learn*."

Exactly a month later he writes to Rickman again, in this strain: "Your guineas (which, let me tell you, are too much, but you shall have your way) are not absolutely mal-a-pros, for by a cruel reverse of Fortune, that Dame who is painted with a wheel to signify to you that she is changes, and rollings, and mutabilities, I am no longer Paragraph spinner. . . . I have given this up only two days, and I feel myself at elbow room, free and happy. I can scribble now at my heart's Leisure, if I have an impulse, and tho' I know I speak as a fool, I am sure I can write better gratis. Say no more about it, I have weighed my loss and my gain, and I write *Profit*."

We see therefore that Lamb's first set of paragraphs for the *Morning Post* must be sought for between early January and the middle of February, 1802. I fancy that most of those that follow may be attributed to his playful hand.

Mr. MONK LEWIS has reason to complain of his friends, the *fairies* and *hobgoblins*, that they did not save him from his late fall. As to the genii, it is well known that he never had so much as one of them to protect him. [Jan. 1st, 1802.]

A pupil of Mr. BURKE, who heard of the French orator's scheme of planting *funeral vistas* and *melancholy shades*, thought of his old master's memorable sentence: "In the *groves* of their *academy*, at the end of every *vista*, you see nothing but the gallows!"—A good hint to French vista-fanciers. [Jan. 1st, 1802.]

Mr. MONK LEWIS was so much hurt by his fall, that, we are told, he continued for some minutes *senseless*. *Very probable*. [Jan. 2nd, 1802.]

It is now asserted that the practice of *vaccine inoculation* was known to the antients; and that the transformation of NEBUCHADNEZZAR was effected by a series of successful operations to *brutify* the human species. [Jan. 4th, 1802.]

The bird that *can* sing, and *won't* sing, must be *made* to sing. The PYE [the Poet Laureate] is a bird that *will* sing, and *can't* sing, and never was *made* for singing. [Jan. 4th, 1802.]

When ladies of such *rotund proportions* as MRS. POWELL and Mrs. BLAND make such *slender sprites and speeches*, we may suppose they can bear *compression*. [Jan. 7th, 1802. See page 309.]

Twelfth-day merry-makers *draw King* and *Queen*, and nobody wonders. The only wonder is, how Mr. A——N [Addington] came to *attract* His MAJESTY. [Jan. 8th, 1802.]

To see some of the prize ribs, and fashionable surloins, which hang up in our markets, one would imagine, that some of "nature's journeymen" had made the beasts, and *left out the lean*. [Jan. 8th, 1802.]

We find in the weekly account of clerical promotions that the Rev. Mr. *Sheepshanks* succeeds Dr. *Mereweather* in the Rectory of *Bleating*. [Jan. 18th, 1802.]

In a late conversation upon the subject of the great days sporting at Mr. COKE's, a Cockney observed, "that he knew nothing about Norfolk Rabbits, but that he would engage to take a *Welch Rabbit* with any man in the kingdom." [Jan. 19th, 1802.]

There is no *virtue* like *necessity*, says the proverb. If that be true, what a quantity of *virtue* there must be among the lower orders of people in this country! [Jan. 22nd, 1802.]

There was a fine display of female *ancles* yesterday, in consequence of the *high wind*, and many a beau's breast was *blown* into a *flame*. [Jan. 22nd, 1802.]

A dashing young buck, from one of our Universities, was lately congratulating himself upon being appointed to an advantageous situation as Tutor to a young Nobleman; a friend observed, that he would now enjoy the delightful occupation of "Teaching the young idea how to *shoot*."—"Aye, aye," he replied, "I will teach the young dog *how to shoot*." [Jan. 22nd, 1802. Lamb tells this story of Valentine Le Grice, in a letter to Coleridge in 1796.]

We hope our illustrious Commander in Egypt will not tarnish his *living laurels* with an overmuch anxiety about *dead Beys*. [Jan. 28th, 1802.]

A *ghost* would certainly make a *fashionable wife*, as, according to the ghostly system, her husband and she would never meet but *at night*. [Jan. 29th, 1802.]

If relationship and kindred be inferred from similarity of name and sentiments, BURKE, the *pugilist*, is a near relation to BURKE, the orator. This latter gentleman, if we mistake not, in his Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful, recommends *black* and *blue* as more solemn and sublime than white, green, or yellow; and in explicit terms extols *purple*. [Jan. 30th, 1802.]

*Painters* and *Parliament men* are, we find, alike flatterers upon *canvas*. [Feb. 2nd, 1802.]

The *widows* of the English Officers who married *natives* in India only evince their lasting attachment to *sables*. [Feb. 3rd, 1802.]

A *bench* of Justices certainly gives us an idea of something *wooden*. SHAKESPEARE, in his seven ages, represents a Justice as made up with saws, &c. [Feb. 3rd, 1802.]

Mr. PITT having proved himself an unworthy *Guardian*, and an useless *Tatler*, has for some time past been an *Idler* in Bond-street, and is at present in the House of Commons a *Spectator*. [Feb. 6th, 1802.]

LOCKE compares the mind of a new born infant to a sheet of white paper not yet written on. It must be confessed, that whoever wrote upon Mr. A——N'S mind has left *large margins*. [Feb. 10th, 1802.]

In some countries, a slip in the matrimonial life is punished with the loss of the offender's *teeth:* what a mortification to the eager devourers of *sandwiches!* [Feb. 11th, 1802.]

*Old Q.* in his great attention to subjects of *natural* history, has of late made some surprising discoveries in *chemise-try.* [Feb. 12th, 1802.]

The jest of the new opera lies in a *woman* being *concealed* in a *Cabinet*—we do not approve of *petticoat influence* in *Cabinets.* [Feb. 12th, 1802.]

From the increasing number of men that have fallen victims to the justice of their country, who formerly figured away in the haunts of *fashionable life*, the *fatal cord* has properly been termed a *beau-string.* [Feb. 13th, 1802.]

It is now time to quote *Elia.* "In those days [1801-1803] every Morning Paper, as an essential retainer to its establishment, kept an author, who was bound to furnish daily a quantum of witty paragraphs. Sixpence a joke—and it was thought pretty high too—was Dan Stuart's settled remuneration in these cases. The chat of the day, scandal, but, above all, *dress*, furnished the material. The length of no paragraph was to exceed seven lines. Shorter they might be, but they must be poignant.

"A fashion of *flesh*, or rather *pink*-coloured hose for the ladies, luckily coming up at the juncture, when we were on our probation for the place of Chief Jester to S.'s paper, established our reputation in that line. We were pronounced a 'capital hand.' O the conceits which we varied upon *red* in all its prismatic differences! from the trite and obvious flower of Cytherea, to the flaming costume of the lady that has her sitting upon 'many waters.' Then there was the collateral topic of ancles. What an occasion to a truly chaste writer, like ourself, of touching that nice brink, and yet never tumbling over it, of a seemingly ever approximating something 'not quite proper;' while, like a skilful posture-master, balancing betwixt decorums and their opposites, he keeps the line, from which a hair's-breadth deviation is destruction; hovering in the confines of light and darkness, or where 'both seem either;' a hazy uncertain delicacy; Autolycus-like in the Play, still putting off his expectant auditory with 'Whoop, do me no harm, good man!' But, above all, that conceit arrided us most at that time, and still tickles our midriff to remember, where, allusively to the flight of Astræa—*ultima Cœlestûm terras reliquit*—we pronounced—in reference to the stockings still—that MODESTY TAKING HER FINAL LEAVE OF MORTALS, HER LAST BLUSH WAS VISIBLE IN HER

ASCENT TO THE HEAVENS BY THE TRACT OF THE GLOWING INSTEP. This might be called the crowning conceit; and was esteemed tolerable writing in those days.

"But the fashion of jokes, with all other things, passes away; as did the transient mode which had so favoured us. The ancles of our fair friends in a few weeks began to reassume their whiteness, and left us scarce a leg to stand upon. Other female whims followed, but none, methought, so pregnant, so invitatory of shrewd conceits, and more than single meanings.

"Somebody has said, that to swallow six cross-buns daily consecutively for a fortnight would surfeit the stoutest digestion. But to have to furnish as many jokes daily, and that not for a fortnight, but for a long twelvemonth, as we were constrained to do, was a little harder execution. 'Man goeth forth to his work until the evening'—from a reasonable hour in the morning, we presume it was meant. Now as our main occupation took us up from eight till five every day in the City; and as our evening hours, at that time of life, had generally to do with any thing rather than business, it follows, that the only time we could spare for this manufactory of jokes—our supplementary livelihood, that supplied us in every want beyond mere bread and cheese—was exactly that part of the day which (as we have heard of No Man's Land) may be fitly denominated No Man's Time; that is, no time in which a man ought to be up, and awake, in. To speak more plainly, it is that time, of an hour, or an hour and a half's duration, in which a man, whose occasions call him up so preposterously, has to wait for his breakfast.

"O those headaches at dawn of day, when at five, or half-past-five in summer, and not much later in the dark seasons, we were compelled to rise, having been perhaps not above four hours in bed—(for we were no go-to-beds with the lamb, though we anticipated the lark ofttimes in her rising—we liked a parting cup at midnight, as all young men did before these effeminate times, and to have our friends about us—we were not constellated under Aquarius, that watery sign, and therefore incapable of Bacchus, cold, washy, bloodless—we were none of your Basilian water-sponges, nor had taken our degrees at Mount Ague—we were right toping Capulets, jolly companions, we and they)—but to have to get up, as we said before, curtailed of half our fair sleep, fasting, with only a dim vista of refreshing

Bohea in the distance—to be necessitated to rouse ourselves at the detestable rap of an old hag of a domestic, who seemed to take a diabolical pleasure in her announcement that it was 'time to rise;' and whose chappy knuckles we have often yearned to amputate, and string them up at our chamber door, to be a terror to all such unseasonable rest-breakers in future—

"'Facil' and sweet, as Virgil sings, had been the 'descending' of the over-night, balmy the first sinking of the heavy head upon the pillow; but to get up, as he goes on to say,

—revocare gradus, superasque evadere ad auras—

and to get up moreover to make jokes with malice prepended—there was the 'labour,' there the 'work.'

"No Egyptian taskmaster ever devised a slavery like to that, our slavery. No fractious operants ever turned out for half the tyranny, which this necessity exercised upon us. Half a dozen jests in a day (bating Sundays too), why, it seems nothing! We make twice the number every day in our lives as a matter of course, and claim no Sabbatical exemptions. But then they come into our head. But when the head has to go out to them—when the mountain must go to Mahomet—

"Reader, try it for once, only for one short twelvemonth.

"It was not every week that a fashion of pink stockings came up; but mostly, instead of it, some rugged, untractable subject; some topic impossible to be contorted into the risible; some feature, upon which no smile could play; some flint, from which no process of ingenuity could procure a distillation. There they lay; there your appointed tale of brick-making was set before you, which you must finish, with or without straw, as it happened. The craving Dragon—*the Public*—like him in Bel's temple—must be fed; it expected its daily rations; and Daniel, and ourselves, to do us justice, did the best we could on this side bursting him." Lamb goes on to say that on the *Morning Post* changing proprietorship, he passed to the *Albion*. But what, as I have said, really happened was that at the beginning of 1802 he had five or six weeks on the *Morning Post;* gave it up in February; and then, two years after the *Albion's* decease, on the *Morning Post* changing proprietorship, which it did in September, 1803 (the issue for September 20th was the last to

bear Stuart's imprint), he joined the staff again, and began a connection as chief jester that lasted for some months.

The fashion of red stockings came in about October, 1803, and raged until the end of the year; and though Lamb's specimen joke, quoted above, is not found among them, many of his conceits upon the colour are easily identified. Perhaps that crowning jest was of more mature conception—a specimen of *l'esprit d'escalier*. It will be seen, from the paragraphs that follow, that in those days Lamb was a mechanical humorist. Newspaper jokes were more easily made than now: the competition was not so keen and the choice of subject was wider. Ladies' underclothing, a source of perpetual delight to wags of the *Morning Post*, is no longer fair game, nor does Crim. Con. yield facetious copy as once it did. But, none the less, some of Lamb's italics are painfully like the italics of our own comic press. I think there need be very little doubt that Lamb's hand ("sparing neither man nor woman") may be seen in the very harmless quips that follow; certainly few journalists but he could have written those that have a literary motive.

The only sign of *modesty* in the present dress of the Ladies is the *pink dye* of their stockings, which makes their legs appear to *blush* for the total absence of petticoats. [Oct. 3rd, 1803.]

The fugitive and mercurial matter, of which a *Lady's blush* is made, after coursing from its natural position, the *cheek*, to the *tip* of the elbow, and thence diverging for a time to the *knee*, has finally settled in the *legs*, where, in the form of a pair of *red hose*, it combines with the posture and situation *of the times*, to put on a most *warlike* and *martial appearance*. [Oct. 8th, 1803.]

A species of *scarlet fever* seems not only to have infected the *ladies' legs;* but, if we may judge from their constant attendance on the volunteers, their *heads* and *hearts* are affected with the same disorder. [Oct. 22nd, 1803.]

FASHIONS. Hats, bonnets, pelises, spencers, for the grave autumnal season, all made of *velvet black*, figuring *smooth speech* and sober thoughts, two "excellent gifts in woman." [Oct. 24th, 1803.]

BARTRAM, who, as a *traveller*, was possessed of a very *lively fancy*, describes vast plains in the interior of America, where his *horse's fetlocks* for miles were dyed a perfect blood colour, in the juice of the wild strawberries. A less ardent fancy than BARTRAM'S may apply this beautiful phenomenon of summer, to solve the present *strawberry appearance* of the *female leg* this autumn in England. [Nov. 2nd, 1803.]

The *roseate tint*, so agreeably diffused through the silk stockings of our females, induces the belief that the *dye is cast* for their lovers. [Nov. 3rd, 1803.]

Curiosity is on tip-toe for the arrival of ELPHY BEY'S fair *Circassian* Ladies. The attraction of their *naturally-placed, fine, proverbial bloom*, is only wanting, to

reduce the wandering colour in the "elbows" and "ancles" of our *belles*, back to its native *metropolis* and *palace*, the "cheek." [Nov. 9th, 1803.]

The *red lights* of his *mistress's stockings* are enough to set a poor lover *beside himself;*

Like Pentheus, when distracted with his fear,
He saw *two suns* and double Thebes appear. [Nov. 11th, 1803.]

The poets have always been lovers of good liquor from the times of ANACREON and BEN JONSON downwards; hence they are sometimes termed in derision dram-atists. [Nov. 12th, 1803.]

*Pink stockings* beneath *dark pelices* are emblems of *Sincerity* and Discretion; signifying a *warm heart* beneath a *cool exterior.* [Nov. 22nd, 1803.]

The decline of red stockings is as fatal to the wits, as the going out of a fashion to an overstocked jeweller; some of these gentry have literally for some months past *fed* on *roses.* [Nov. 29th, 1803.]

It was prettily sung of the *Bride*, in a ballad "upon a wedding":

Her *feet* beneath her *petticoat*
Like *little mice* stole *in* and *out*,
As if they fear'd the light.

These *little mice* (if long quarters go on improving) will in time contrive to get out of their *old trap* the *shoe.* They have begun to exhibit shrewd symptoms of *peeping.* [Dec. 5th, 1803.]

The licentious comments of the wits upon the Ladies' red stockings, have been to that innocent fashion "as killing as the canker to the ROSE." [Dec. 12th, 1803.]

SHAKESPEARE finely contrasts the "rich jewel" with the "*Ethiop's* ear," MILTON the "white silken turbans" of his Indian ambassadors with their "dusk faces." A more beautiful juxta-position remained to be tried in the ornaments of *jet* illustrating the *clear white skin* of a modern fashionable beauty. [Dec. 17th, 1803.]

Yellow straw hats "turned up with black," are beginning to be fashionable; like that *flower* which MILTON in *Lycidas* speaks of,

. . . on the edge
Inscribed with woe. [Dec. 19th, 1803.]

The fashion of red stockings, so much cried down, dispraised, and followed, is on the eve of departing, to be consigned to the family tomb of "all the fashions," where sleep in peace the *ruffs* and *hoops*, and *fardingales* of past centuries; and

All its beauty, all its pomp, decays,
Like *Courts removing*, or like *ending plays.* [Dec. 21st, 1803.]

The *long-quartered* shoes and the *tight* drapery contribute equally to display the foot and ancle to advantage. The *pink stockings* have fallen into disuse, probably because they exhibited the appearance of a *blush* on the part for the *exposure.* [Dec. 24th, 1803.]

In the humorous list of CURLL'S authors, we meet with "a Pindaric writer in red stockings." *Feet of equal length* are thought to *show off* best in them now-a-days. [Dec. 28th, 1803.]

SHAKESPEARE'S AMOURS. The French, *jealous* of our *old Bard*, scandalously hint at his *too great familiarity* with NATURE. [Dec. 29th, 1803.]

There are fewer signs of Lamb's hand in 1804, and we know from a letter of Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart in May of that year that for the second time he had ceased to contribute. This time his severance of connection was final. On February 7th, 1804, was printed the following "Epitaph upon a young lady who lived neglected and died obscure," signed C. L. :—

Under this cold marble stone
Lie the sad remains of one
Who, when alive, by few or none
Was lov'd, as lov'd she might have been,
If she prosp'rous days had seen,
Or had thriving been, I ween.
Only this cold funeral stone
Tells, she was beloved by one,
Who on the marble graves his moan.

These lines Lamb had written two years previously, upon Mary Druitt, a young friend of Rickman's, who died at the age of nineteen, at Wimborne.

Among the paragraphs between January and May, which I think may be Lamb's, are these :—

Two very *rich lines* of an old poet, describing a garden-life, paint the adventures of the Prince in *Cinderella :*

Stumbling on *mellons*, as I pass,
*Ensnared* with *flowers*, I fall on grass. [Jan. 11th, 1804.]

A pert Grammarian being told that a certain young Lady understood Latin, asked her if she understood "*Propria quæ maribus*"—"Yes, Sir," replied she, "and an *ass*, 'in presenti.'" [April 18th, 1804.]

Lamb often quotes Marvell, and he tells us more than once that the quip "ass *in praesenti* makes a wise man *in futuro*" was a favourite joke of James Boyer's at Christ's Hospital. The reference in the first paragraph is to Harriet Mellon, who nearly three years later played in Lamb's "Mr. H."

On September 28th, 1805, Lamb tells Wordsworth that he lost his newspaper work at "the beginning of last year;" but probably it was in April or May. In telling Sarah Stoddart about it Mary Lamb adds, "What we dreaded as an evil has proved a great blessing, for we have both strangely recovered our health and spirits since this has happened."

So far as we know Lamb never became a journalist again, if we except the political epigrams he contributed to the *Examiner* and *Champion* in 1812 and 1819.

## CHAPTER XIX

### 1802

A Peer in Lamb's Rooms—*John Woodvil* Published—Its Reception by the Critics—The Lambs among the Lakes—Wordsworth and Lamb at Bartholomew Fair—Thomas Holcroft—Children's Books.

THE first letter to Rickman in 1802, dated January 9th, shows us the Lambs in high society. "Dyer has at last met with a madman more mad than himself—the Earl of Buchan, brother to the Erskines and eccentric biographer of Fletcher of Saltoun. This old man of near eighty is come to London on his way to France, and George and he go about everywhere. George brought the mad Lord up to see me—I wasn't at home but Mary was washing—a pretty pickle to receive an Earl in! Lord have mercy upon us! a Lord in my garret! My utmost ambition was some time or other to receive a Secretary! Well, I am to breakfast with this mad Lord on Sunday. I am studying manners. George and my Lord of Buchan went on Thursday last to Richmond in the Long Coach to pay their devotions to the shrine of Thomson! The coldest day in the year. Enough to cool a Jerusalem-Padder. George is as proud as a Turkey Cock and can talk of nothing else; always taking care to hedge in at the end that he don't value Lords, and that the Earl has nothing of the Lord about him. O human nature! human nature! for my part I have told every Body, how I had an Earl come to see me. . . ."

At the beginning of 1802, or possibly the end of 1801, Lamb was doing a very reckless thing—printing *John Woodvil* at his own expense. He tells Rickman, who seems to have offered a loan or a donation, in these words: "I sincerely thank you for your repeated offer, but I have just received as much as £50, an old debt which I told you of, and that will a good deal and more than cover the expences of printing."

The play was published in February, and Lamb, as he told Mr. Fuller Russell in 1834, lost £25 by it. In the same slender volume were the Imitations of Burton and a little verse, including Mary Lamb's ballad of "Helen." We have from time to time seen what Lamb's friends thought of his play. In so far as it is considered as drama, it must be confessed to be a failure and Southey's epithet "lukewarm" just; but *John Woodvil* has many beauties and an unfailing distinction of style. Lamb alone could have written it, not only by reason of its characteristic and curiously successful archaisms, but also because no other mind was so steeped in the Elizabethan writers, but for whom *John Woodvil* could never have existed. Lamb's was not a dramatic talent, fine and sure critic though he was of the drama of others; nor except very occasionally had he the art, fine and sure critic as he was of the melody of other poets, of making music for himself. The broken irregular unrhymed lines of the play often defy scansion; yet the following lyrical passage should endure as long as any of his poetry:—

SIR WALTER

Fie upon it.
All men are false, I think. The date of love
Is out, expired, its stories all grown stale,
O'erpast, forgotten, like an antique tale
Of Hero and Leander.

SIMON

I have known some men that are too general-contemplative for the narrow passion. I am in some sort a *general* lover.

MARGARET

In the name of the boy God, who plays at hood-man-blind with the Muses. and cares not whom he catches: what is it *you* love?

SIMON

Simply, all things that live,
From the crook'd worm to man's imperial form,
And God-resembling likeness. The poor fly,
That makes short holyday in the sun beam,
And dies by some child's hand. The feeble bird
With little wings, yet greatly venturous
In the upper sky. The fish in th' other element,
That knows no touch of eloquence. What else?
Yon tall and elegant stag,
Who paints a dancing shadow of his horns
In the water, where he drinks.

MARGARET

I myself love all these things, yet so as with a difference:—for example, some animals better than others, some men rather than other men; the nightingale before the cuckoo, the swift and graceful palfrey before the slow and asinine mule. Your humour goes to confound all qualities.

What sports do you use in the forest?

SIMON

Not many; some few, as thus:—
To see the sun to bed, and to arise,
Like some hot amourist with glowing eyes,
Bursting the lazy bands of sleep that bound him,
With all his fires and travelling glories round him.
Sometimes the moon on soft night clouds to rest,
Like beauty nestling in a young man's breast,
And all the winking stars, her handmaids, keep
Admiring silence, while those lovers sleep.
Sometimes outstretcht, in very idleness,
Nought doing, saying little, thinking less,
To view the leaves, thin dancers upon air,
Go eddying round; and small birds, how they fare,
When mother Autumn fills their beaks with corn,
Filch'd from the careless Amalthea's horn;
And how the woods berries and worms provide
Without their pains, when earth has nought beside
To answer their small wants.
To view the graceful deer come tripping by,
Then stop, and gaze, then turn, they know not why,
Like bashful younkers in society.
To mark the structure of a plant or tree,
And all fair things of earth, how fair they be.

MARGARET

(*Smiling.*) And, afterwards them paint in simile.

*John Woodvil* was not well received by the critics. The *Edinburgh Review* made heavy fun of it, and the *Annual Review* turned it to ridicule, ending a destructive and contemptuous criticism with the words, "What precious nonsense! but this is a specimen of that canting, whining style, or rather *slang* of poetry, which is now-a-days offered to us as the very essence of simplicity and pathos!"

In a letter in December, 1803, Southey told Lieut. Southey that Mrs. Barbauld wrote this "infamous account of Lamb's play;" and in a letter to Coleridge in March, 1804, he asked, "Why have you not made Lamb declare war upon Mrs. Barebald? He should singe her flaxen wig with squibs, and tie

crackers to her petticoats till she leapt about like a parched pea for very torture. There is not a man in the world who could so well revenge himself." Lamb, however, took no steps, showing his usual composure in the face of a failure. Later, as we shall see, he became friendly with Mrs. Barbauld and the Aikins, and then learned that the author of the *Hymns in Prose* had not been his censor after all.

Early in 1802 Lamb lost Manning, who went to Paris to study Chinese under Dr. Hagan. We have seen also that in the middle of February he ceased to write for the *Morning Post*. Beyond these two events nothing of any importance happened until August, when Lamb and his sister paid an impulsive visit to Coleridge at Keswick. Their adventures are told in the letter to Manning of September 24th: "Since the date of my last letter, I have been a traveller. A strong desire seized me of visiting remote regions. My first impulse was to go and see Paris. It was a trivial objection to my aspiring mind, that I did not understand a word of the language, since I certainly intend some time in my life to see Paris, and equally certainly never intend to learn the language; therefore that could be no objection. However, I am very glad I did not go, because you had left Paris (I see) before I could have set out. I believe Stoddart promising to go with me another year prevented that plan. My next scheme, (for to my restless, ambitious mind London was become a bed of thorns) was to visit the far-famed peak in Derbyshire, where the Devil sits, they say, without breeches. *This* my purer mind rejected as indelicate. And my final resolve was a tour to the Lakes.

"I set out with Mary to Keswick, without giving Coleridge any notice; for my time being precious did not admit of it. He received us with all the hospitality in the world, and gave up his time to show us all the wonders of the country. He dwells upon a small hill by the side of Keswick, in a comfortable house, quite enveloped on all sides by a net of mountains: great floundering bears and monsters they seemed, all couchant and asleep. We got in in the evening, travelling in a post-chaise from Penrith, in the midst of a gorgeous sunshine, which transmuted all the mountains into colours, purple, &c. &c. We thought we had got into fairyland. But that went off (as it never came again—while we stayed we had no more fine sunsets); and we entered

Coleridge's comfortable study just in the dusk, when the mountains were all dark with clouds upon their heads. Such an impression I never received from objects of sight before, nor do I suppose I can ever again. Glorious creatures, fine old fellows, Skiddaw, &c. I never shall forget ye, how ye lay about that night, like an intrenchment; gone to bed, as it seemed for the night, but promising that ye were to be seen in the morning. Coleridge had got a blazing fire in his study; which is a large, antique, ill-shaped room, with an old-fashioned organ, never played upon, big enough for a church, shelves of scattered folios, an Æolian harp, and an old sofa, half-bed, &c. And all looking out upon the last fading view of Skiddaw and his broad-breasted brethren: what a night!

"Here we stayed three full weeks, in which time I visited Wordsworth's cottage, where we stayed a day or two with the Clarksons (good people and most hospitable, at whose house we tarried one day and night), and saw Lloyd. The Wordsworths were gone to Calais. They have since been in London and past much time with us: he is now gone into Yorkshire to be married. . . . So we have seen Keswick, Grasmere, Ambleside. Ulswater (where the Clarksons live), and a place at the other end of Ulswater—I forget the name—to which we travelled on a very sultry day, over the middle of Helvellyn. We have clambered up to the top of Skiddaw, and I have waded up the bed of Lodore. In fine, I have satisfied myself, that there is such a thing as that which tourists call *romantic*, which I very much suspected before: they make such a spluttering about it, and toss their splendid epithets around them, till they give as dim a light as at four o'clock next morning the lamps do after an illumination. Mary was excessively tired, when she got about half-way up Skiddaw, but we came to a cold rill (than which nothing can be imagined more cold, running over cold stones), and with the reinforcement of a draught of cold water she surmounted it most manfully. Oh, its fine black head, and the bleak air atop of it, with a prospect of mountains all about, and about, making you giddy; and then Scotland afar off, and the border countries so famous in song and ballad! It was a day that will stand out, like a mountain, I am sure, in my life.

"But I am returned (I have now been come home near three weeks—I was a month out), and you cannot conceive the degra-

dation I felt at first, from being accustomed to wander free as air among mountains, and bathe in rivers without being controlled by any one, to come home and *work*. I felt very *little*. I had been dreaming I was a very great man. But that is going off, and I find I shall conform in time to that state of life to which it has pleased God to call me. Besides, after all, Fleet-Street and the Strand are better places to live in for good and all than among Skiddaw. Still, I turn back to those great places where I wandered about, participating in their greatness. After all, I could not *live* in Skiddaw. I could spend a year—two, three years among them, but I must have a prospect of seeing Fleet-Street at the end of that time, or I should mope and pine away, I know. Still, Skiddaw is a fine creature."

Barry Cornwall tells us that on being asked how he felt when amongst the lakes and mountains of Cumberland, Lamb replied that he was obliged to think of the Ham and Beef shop near Saint Martin's Lane in order to bring his thoughts from their almost too painful elevation to the sober regions of everyday life. And Leigh Hunt somewhere remarks that Lamb stopped him in the midst of a beautiful country lane to point out how inferior it was to Wardour Street.

Wordsworth had left Grasmere with his sister in July; they passed through London, and on the last day of the month he wrote the sonnet on Westminster Bridge; they then stayed at Calais for a while, and returning to England at the end of August, Wordsworth saw Lamb and accompanied him to Bartholomew Fair. On October 4th, 1802, he was married to Mary Hutchinson.

Later in the same letter Lamb touches upon other matters, but his words about himself must not, I think, be taken too literally. "My habits are changing, I think, i.e. from drunk to sober. Whether I shall be happier or not remains to be proved. I shall certainly be more happy in a morning; but whether I shall not sacrifice the fat, and the marrow, and the kidneys, i.e. the night, the glorious care-drowning night, that heals all our wrongs, pours wine into our mortifications, changes the scene from indifferent and flat to bright and brilliant!—O Manning, if I should have formed a diabolical resolution, by the time you come to England, of not admitting any spirituous liquors into my house, will you be my guest on such shameworthy terms? Is life, with such

limitations, worth trying? ' The truth is, that my liquors bring a nest of friendly harpies about my house, who consume me. This is a pitiful tale to be read at St. Gothard; but it is just now nearest my heart. Fenwick is a ruined man. He is hiding himself from his creditors, and has sent his wife and children into the country. Fell, my other drunken companion (that has been: nam hic cæstus artemque repono), is turned editor of a 'Naval Chronicle.' Godwin (with a pitiful artificial wife) continues a steady friend, though the same facility does not remain of visiting him often. That bitch Mrs. Godwin has detached Marshall from his house, Marshall the man who went to sleep when the 'Ancient Mariner' was reading: the old, steady, unalterable friend of the Professor."

The letter also mentions, for the first time, Thomas Holcroft, the dramatist, with whom Lamb seems to have been upon some terms of intimacy and whose life Hazlitt afterwards wrote. Holcroft was a man of advanced views. He had been imprisoned for high treason in 1794 with Hardy, Horne Tooke, Thelwall, and seven others, and had suffered in other ways for his beliefs and want of beliefs. In his open Letter to Southey in 1823 Lamb wrote, "One of the most candid, most upright, and single-meaning men, I ever knew, was the late Thomas Holcroft. I believe he never said one thing and meant another, in his life; and, as near as I can guess, he never acted otherwise than with the most scrupulous attention to conscience. Ought we to wish the character false, for the sake of a hollow compliment to Christianity?" Holcroft is to-day known to playgoers only by the occasional revival in the provinces of his "Road to Ruin," and to readers of poetical collections by his ballad of "Gaffer Gray," the philosophy of which would be quite to Lamb's taste:—

GAFFER GRAY

Ho, why dost thou shiver and shake,
Gaffer Gray?
And why does thy nose look so blue?
"'Tis the weather that's cold,
'Tis I'm grown very old,
And my doublet is not very new,
Well-a-day!"

Then line thy worn doublet with ale,
Gaffer Gray;
And warm thy old heart with a glass.
"Nay, but credit I've none,
And my money's all gone;
Then say how may that come to pass?
Well-a-day!"

Hie away to the house on the brow,
Gaffer Gray;
And knock at the jolly priest's door.
"The priest often preaches
Against worldly riches,
But ne'er gives a mite to the poor,
Well-a-day!"

The lawyer lives under the hill,
Gaffer Gray;
Warmly fenced both in back and in front.
"He will fasten his locks,
And will threaten the stocks
Should he ever more find me in want,
Well-a-day!"

The squire has fat beeves and brown ale,
Gaffer Gray;
And the season will welcome you there.
"His fat beeves and his beer,
And his merry new year,
Are all for the flush and the fair,
Well-a-day!"

My keg is but low, I confess,
Gaffer Gray;
What then? While it lasts, man, we'll live.
"The poor man alone,
When he hears the poor moan,
Of his morsel a morsel will give,
Well-a-day!"

We see very little of Holcroft in the letters; but Lamb in one place accuses him of dulness in company. He died in 1809 at the age of sixty-four, and his widow married James Kenney, another dramatist-friend of Lamb's. With Mrs. Kenney and with Holcroft's daughters, Fanny and Louisa (afterwards Mrs. Badams), Lamb continued on friendly terms to the end.

The letter to Coleridge on October 23rd tells of the death of Sam Le Grice, and shows Lamb beginning to take seriously the question of children's books, not, I think, with any view of writing one, but as possible gifts for Hartley Coleridge. "Mrs.

Barbauld's stuff has banished all the old classics of the nursery; and the shopman at Newbery's hardly deign'd to reach them off an old exploded corner of a shelf, when Mary ask'd for them. Mrs. B.'s and Mrs. Trimmer's nonsense lay in piles about. Knowledge insignificant and vapid as Mrs. B.'s books convey, it seems, must come to a child in the *shape* of *knowledge*, and his empty noddle must be turned with conceit of his own powers when he has learnt that a Horse is an animal, and Billy is better than a Horse, and such like; instead of that beautiful Interest in wild tales which made the child a man, while all the time he suspected himself to be no bigger than a child. Science has succeeded to Poetry no less in the little walks of children than with men. Is there no possibility of averting this sore evil? Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives' fables in childhood, you had been crammed with geography and natural history?"

It is probably no more than a chance coincidence that Lamb goes on to praise Chapman's Homer, which he had just read—the book which was to provide him with the material for one of his own books for children, the *Adventures of Ulysses*.

The same letter suggests that Coleridge had arranged with Lamb that he should make some versified translations—probably from the German, the text of which Coleridge would supply in literal prose—to be sent to the *Morning Post*. But the plan did not come to anything. Lamb says, in connection with it, "If I could but get 50*l*. a year only, in addition to what I have, I should live in affluence."

## CHAPTER XX

### 1803

Captain Burney—"Sarah Battle"—Martin Burney—Colonel Phillips—William Ayrton—Whist-Table Jokes—Manning's Chinese Projects—Hester Savory—Coleridge at 16 Mitre Court Buildings—Smoking—Lamb and Dr. Parr—Mary Lamb's Gossip—Enter Sarah Stoddart—Mary Lamb's Good Sense—Talfourd's Testimony—Lamb's Difficulties in Reviewing.

WITH 1803 came more new friends into the Lamb circle—the Burneys. Captain James Burney (as he then was, Rear-Admiral Burney as he came to be) was in that year fifty-three, home from the sea for ever, and living at 26 Little James Street, Pimlico. He was just beginning his *History of the Discoveries in the South Sea*, in five volumes, which he did not finish until 1817, possibly because of a too intense devotion to whist. The captain, who was the son of Dr. Charles Burney, the historian of music and friend of Johnson, and therefore brother of Fanny Burney (then Madame D'Arblay), author of *Evelina*, had a fine record at his back: sailing with Captain Cook on his second and third voyage, being present at the great navigator's death, and returning as commander of the famous *Discovery*. In 1783, as captain of the *Bristol*, of fifty guns, he fought under Sir Edward Hughes in the East Indies. Lamb describes him to Manning on February 19th as a "merry *natural* captain" who once made a pun in the Otaheité language—a better recommendation as a companion than all his honours of exploration or of war. Burney further endeared himself to Lamb by the remark that he liked Shakespeare because he was "so much the gentleman."

There is good reason for believing that in Sarah Burney, the captain's wife, Lamb found the original of Sarah Battle; but he may have superimposed some alien characteristics. "'A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game.' This was the celebrated *wish* of old Sarah Battle (now with God), who, next

to her devotions, loved a good game at whist. She was none of your lukewarm gamesters, your half and half players, who have no objection to take a hand, if you want one to make up a rubber; who affirm that they have no pleasure in winning; that they like to win one game and lose another; that they can while away an hour very agreeably at a card-table, but are indifferent whether they play or no; and will desire an adversary, who has slipped a wrong card, to take it up and play another. These insufferable triflers are the curse of a table. One of these flies will spoil a whole pot. Of such it may be said, that they do not play at cards, but only play at playing at them.

"Sarah Battle was none of that breed. She detested them, as I do, from her heart and soul; and would not, save upon a striking emergency, willingly seat herself at the same table with them. She loved a thorough-paced partner, a determined enemy. She took, and gave no concessions. She hated favours. She never made a revoke, nor ever passed it over in her adversary without exacting the utmost forfeiture. She fought a good fight: cut and thrust. . . ." And so forth; the essay is known to all.

Of Mrs. Burney in her own person we see but little in Lamb's correspondence; but her son Martin Charles Burney for the most part passed intimately into the Lambs' life—in these early days, perhaps, rather as a half-pathetic disciple than an intellectual companion. I have not succeeded in learning as much of Martin Burney as I should like; but this we know, that he was to the end intensely devoted to Charles and Mary Lamb and that the Lambs always had his well-being very near their hearts. In 1803 he was a boy of fifteen.

We have a picture of Martin Burney in a letter from Southey to Coleridge on June 11th, 1804: "The captain hath a son—begotten, according to Lamb, upon a mermaid; and thus far is certain, that he is the queerest fish out of water. A paralytic affection in childhood has kept one side of his face stationary, while the other has continued to grow, and the two sides form the most ridiculous whole you can imagine; the boy, however, is a sharp lad, the inside not having suffered." Procter in his Memoir of Lamb thus describes him: "The man whom I found at Lamb's house more frequently than any other person was Martin Burney. . . . His face was warped by paralysis,

of friendship the part played by them in the life of Lamb and his sister was destined to be very important by reason of the circumstance that Mrs. Paris, of Cambridge, at whose house the Lambs first saw Emma Isola, was Ayrton's sister.

William Ayrton's admiration of Lamb's genius caused him to prepare the volume of blank pages bound to match the two volumes of the *Works* of 1818, from which I have quoted some mock Latin on page 176. In this he copied or pasted a number of Lamb's later writings in prose and verse (together with two or three pieces that have turned out not to be Lamb's). William Scrope Ayrton, Ayrton's son, records that when Lamb was shown the volume, then blank, he remarked that it was the greatest compliment that had ever been paid him.

Lamb's well-known remark to Martin Burney at the card table —"If dirt was trumps what a hand you'd hold!"—is also attributed to Ayrton; indeed it is called his only joke.[1] On another whist evening Ayrton, after taking a trick by trumping, remarked in triumph, "When Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of war." "But when you meet Greek," said Lamb, "you can't read it."

On February 19th, 1803, Lamb received a blow—a letter from Manning announcing that he was proposing to settle in Independent Tartary. Manning had been out of England for some time, and was thus little in Lamb's actual life, but it is one thing to have a friend so near as France and another so far as Tartary, and under cover of his levity Lamb probably felt the threatened separation very keenly. He seems to have dashed off his famous reply instantly. "Read Sir John Maundevil's travels to cure you, or come over to England. There is a Tartar-man now exhibiting at Exeter Change. Come and talk with him, and hear what he says first. Indeed, he is no very favorable specimen of his Countrymen! But perhaps the best thing you can do, is to *try* to get the idea out of your head. For this purpose repeat to yourself every night, after you have said your prayers, the words Independent Tartary, Independent Tartary, two or three times, and associate with them the *idea of oblivion* ('tis Hartley's method with obstinate memories), or say, Independent, Inde-

[1] Kenney the dramatist told Tom Moore that Lamb used the words to Elliston. Possibly he made the joke more than once; he repeats his good things in his letters.

pendent, have I not already got an *Independence?* That was a clever way of the old puritans—pun-divinity. My dear friend, think what a sad pity it would be to bury such *parts* in heathen countries, among nasty, unconversable, horse-belching, Tartar people! Some say, they are Cannibals; and then conceive a Tartar-fellow *eating* my friend, and adding the *cool malignity* of mustard and vinegar!" Manning was not to be diverted from his purpose of visiting the East, but he did not leave Europe for Asia until 1806.

In his next letter to Manning Lamb copies the beautiful poem "Hester," remarking: "I send you some verses I have made on the death of a young Quaker you may have heard me speak of as being in love with for some years while I lived at Pentonville, though I had never spoken to her in my life. She died about a month since. . . ."

When maidens such as Hester die
Their place ye may not well supply,
Though ye among a thousand try,
With vain endeavour.

A month or more hath she been dead,
Yet cannot I by force be led
To think upon the wormy bed,
And her together.

A springy motion in her gait,
A rising step, did indicate
Of pride and joy no common rate,
That flush'd her spirit,

I know not by what name beside
I shall it call:—if 'twas not pride,
It was a joy to that allied,
She did inherit.

Her parents held the Quaker rule,
Which doth the human feeling cool,
But she was trained in Nature's school,
Nature had blest her.

A waking eye, a prying mind,
A heart that stirs, is hard to bind,
A hawk's keen sight ye cannot blind,
Ye could not Hester.

My sprightly neighbour, gone before
To that unknown and silent shore,
Shall we not meet as heretofore,
Some summer morning,

When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
A bliss that would not go away,
A sweet forewarning?

Hester was Hester Savory, the daughter of Joseph Savory, a Quaker goldsmith in the Strand. She was born on May 31st, 1777—being thus two years younger than Charles Lamb—and at the time to which he refers lived with her brother and two sisters at Pentonville. She was married on July 1st, 1802, to Charles Stoke Dudley, a merchant, and died on February 9th, 1803, aged not quite twenty-six. Her grave is in Bunhill Fields; her memory will last as long as the sweetest English lyrics are read.

In the spring of the year Coleridge was in town on a brief visit, to arrange for the new edition of the *Poems* of 1796 and 1797 which Longman and Rees were to publish. The labour of seeing the book through the press occupied Lamb's evenings throughout May. While in London Coleridge made Mitre Court Buildings his home and was there the unhappy witness of one of Mary Lamb's attacks. In a letter to his wife, on April 4th, he thus describes the circumstance: "I had purposed not to speak of Mary Lamb, but I had better write it than tell it. The Thursday before last she met at Rickman's a Mr. Babb, an old friend and admirer of her Mother. The next day she smiled in an ominous way; on Sunday she told her brother that she was getting bad, with great agony. On Tuesday morning she laid hold of me with violent agitation and talked wildly about George Dyer. I told Charles there was not a moment to lose; and I did not lose a moment, but went for a hackney-coach and took her to the private mad-house at Hugsden [Hoxton]. She was quite calm, and said it was the best to do so. But she wept bitterly two or three times, yet all in a calm way; Charles is cut to the heart."

On April 13th Lamb tells Coleridge that he hopes to have his sister back in a week or two. Later in the letter he asks, "What do you think of smoking? I want your sober, *average noon opinion* of it. I generally am eating my dinner about the time I should determine it. Morning is a Girl, and can't smoke—she's no evidence one way or other; and Night is so evidently *bought over*, that *he* can't be a very upright judge. May be

the truth is, that *one* pipe is wholesome, *two* pipes toothsome, *three* pipes noisome, *four* pipes fulsome, *five* pipes quarrelsome; and that's the *sum* on't. But that is deciding rather upon rhyme than reason." Here we have the first of Lamb's many heart-searchings on the subject of tobacco, to which he was so often to bid farewell again and yet again.

According to the "Confessions of a Drunkard" he was stimulated to smoke by the whist-playing set into which he had just passed from that of Fenwick and Fell. He writes, and we may, I think, consider the passage substantially true, "My next more immediate companions were and are persons of such intrinsic and felt worth, that though accidentally their acquaintance has proved pernicious to me, I do not know that if the thing were to do over again, I should have the courage to eschew the mischief at the price of forfeiting the benefit. I came to them reeking from the steams of my late over-heated notions of companionship; and the slightest fuel which they unconsciously afforded, was sufficient to feed my old fires into a propensity.

"They were no drinkers; but, one from professional habits, and another from a custom derived from his father, smoked tobacco. The devil could not have devised a more subtle trap to re-take a backsliding penitent. The transition, from gulping down draughts of liquid fire to puffing out innocuous blasts of dry smoke, was so like cheating him. But he is too hard for us when we hope to commute. He beats us at barter; and when we think to set off a new failing against an old infirmity, 'tis odds but he puts the trick upon us of two for one. That (comparatively) white devil of tobacco brought with him in the end seven worse than himself." A glance at the commentary on the "Confessions of a Drunkard" in Chapter XXVIII. will show that I do not consider them to be an unvarnished statement of fact; but that they are substantially founded is, I think, evident, and we have a portion of the truth here.

Lamb seems to have smoked with extraordinary fervour. Talfourd tells us that when Dr. Parr,—"who took only the finest tobacco, used to half fill his pipe with salt, and smoked with a philosophical calmness,—saw Lamb smoking the strongest preparation of the weed, puffing out smoke like some furious Enchanter, he gently laid down his pipe, and asked him, how he had acquired his power of smoking at such a rate? Lamb re-

plied, 'I toiled after it, sir, as some men toil after virtue.'" The occasion of this meeting between the essayist and the sturdy old Whig I have not discovered; but it is a pleasant story and I hope true.

A gossiping letter from Mary Lamb to Dorothy Wordsworth, written on July 9th, tells that she was quite herself again and gives us more information about the Lambs' friends. "I have been in better health and spirits this week past than since my last illness—I continued so long so very weak & dejected I began to fear I should never be at all comfortable again. I strive against low spirits all I can, but it is a very hard thing to get the better of.

"I am very uneasy about poor Coleridge, his last letters are very melancholy ones. Remember me affectionately to him and Sara, I hope you often see him.

"Southey is in town, he seems as proud of his little girl as I suppose your brother is of his boy, he says his home is now quite a different place to what it used to be—I was glad to hear him say this—it used to look rather chearless. [Southey once said that no house was perfect unless it had in it a child rising six years and a kitten rising six months.]

"We went last week with Southey and Rickman and his sister to Sadlers Wells, the lowest and most London-like of all our London amusements. The entertainments were Goody Two Shoes, Jack the Giant Killer, and *Mary of Buttermere!* Poor Mary was very happily married at the end of the piece, to a sailor her former sweetheart. We had a prodigious fine view of her father's house in the vale of Buttermere—mountains very like large haycocks, and a lake like nothing at all. If you had been with us, would you have laughed the whole time like Charles and Miss Rickman, or gone to sleep as Southey and Rickman did?

"Stoddart is in expectation of going soon to Malta as Judge's Advocate: it is likely to be a profitable situation, fifteen hundred a year or more. If he goes he takes with him his sister, and, as I hear from her as a very great secret, a *wife;* you must not mention this because if he stays in England he may not be rich enough to marry for some years. I do not know why I should trouble you with a secret which it seems I am unable to keep myself and which is of no importance to you to hear. . . .

"Charles is very well and very *good*—I mean very sober, but he is very good in every sense of the word, for he has been very kind and patient with me, and I have been a sad trouble to him lately. He has shut out all his friends because he thought company hurt me, and done every thing in his power to comfort and amuse me. We are to go out of town soon for a few weeks, when I hope I shall get quite stout and lively.

"You saw Fenwick when you was with us—perhaps you remember his wife and children were with his brother, a tradesman at Penzance. He (the brother) who was supposed to be in a great way of business, has become a bankrupt; they are now at Penzance without a home and without money, and poor Fenwick, who has been Editor of a country newspaper lately, is likely soon to be quite out of employ; I am distressed for them, for I have a great affection for Mrs. Fenwick.

"How pleasant your little house and orchard must be now. I almost wish I had never seen it. I am always wishing to be with you. I could sit upon that little bench in idleness day long. When you have a leisure hour, a letter from [you], kind friend, will give me the greatest pleasure.

"We have money of yours and I want you to send me some commission to lay it out. Are you not in want of anything? I believe when we go out of town it will be to Margate—I love the seaside and expect much benefit from it, but your mountain scenery has spoiled us we shall find the flat country of the Isle of Thanet very dull. . . ."

According to a note to Rickman, the Lambs did not go to Margate but to the Isle of Wight and to Portsmouth, where they saw Fenwick again.

The party, which included the Burneys, stayed at Cowes, and from there Captain Burney and Lamb sent Rickman a joint letter on July 27th. The captain writes: "We have visited Newport and Carisbrook Castle where we saw a deep well and a cross old woman. We went by water, and friend Lamb (to give a specimen of his seamanship) very ingeniously and unconsciously cast loose the fastenings of the mast, so that mast, sprit, sails, and all the rest tumbled overboard with a crash, and not less to his surprise than to the surprise of every other person in the boat." The best thing in Lamb's part of the letter, which is chiefly taken up with Martin's pranks, is this: "In short nothing

in this house goes right till after supper, then a gentle circumambience of the weed serves to shut out Isle of Wight impertinent scenery and brings us back in fancy to Mutton Lane and the romantic alleys ever green of nether-Holborn, green that owes nothing to grass, but the simple effect of cabbage-water, tripecauls."

In September begins the very interesting series of letters from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart, John Stoddart's sister, concerning that young lady's adventures among lovers; from which we get not only proof of Mary Lamb's sound and shrewd common sense and practical wisdom, but many an intimate glimpse of the Lambs' life. For example, "*Secrecy*," she writes on September 21st, "is certainly a grand failing of yours, it is likewise your *brother's* [John Stoddart's]. . . . By secrecy, I mean you both want the habit of telling each other at the moment every thing that happens—where you go,—and what you do,—the free communication of letters and opinions just as they arrive, as Charles and I do,—and which is, after all, the only groundwork of friendship."

The following passage from the same letter is even more interesting in its revelation of Mary Lamb's exceptional tolerance and sympathetic wisdom: "You will smile when I tell you I think myself the only woman in the world who could live with a brother's wife, and make a real friend of her, partly from early observation of the unhappy example I have just given you [quoted on page 17] and partly from a knack I know I have of looking into people's real characters, and never expecting them to act out of it—never expecting another to do as I would in the same case. When you leave your Mother, and say, if you never shall see her again, you shall feel no remorse; and when you make a *jewish* bargain with your *Lover;* all this gives me no offence, because it is your nature, and your temper, and I do not expect or want you to be otherwise than you are. I love you for the good that is in you, and look for no change." This surely indicates a very unusual and admirable attitude. To love our friends for the best that is in them, neither being offended by the worst nor desirous of mending it, is a state of wisdom to which few men or women attain.

And the passage is true; Mary Lamb was incapable of deceiving herself or any one else. It is a source of deep regret that so few of her letters have survived; but those that I have been able to collect exhibit sympathetic kindliness, serene sense,

and transparent honesty in a degree beyond any writing that I know.

Talfourd's description of Mary Lamb may be quoted here: "Miss Lamb would have been remarkable for the sweetness of her disposition, the clearness of her understanding, and the gentle wisdom of all her acts and words, even if these qualities had not been presented in marvellous contrast with the distraction under which she suffered for weeks, latterly for months, in every year. There was no tinge of insanity discernible in her manner to the most observant eye; not even in those distressful periods when the premonitory symptoms had apprised her of its approach, and she was making preparations for seclusion. In all its essential sweetness, her character was like her brother's; while, by a temper more placid, a spirit of enjoyment more serene, she was enabled to guide, to counsel, to cheer him; and to protect him on the verge of the mysterious calamity, from the depths of which she rose so often unruffled to his side. To a friend in any difficulty she was the most comfortable of advisers, the wisest of consolers. Hazlitt used to say, that he never met with a woman who could reason, and had met with only one thoroughly reasonable—the sole exception being Mary Lamb."

Lamb's last letter of the year is to Godwin, expressing sorrow at his delay in writing a promised review of the philosopher's *Life of Chaucer*. "You, by long habits of composition and a greater command gained over your own powers, cannot conceive," says Lamb, "of the desultory and uncertain way in which I (an author by fits) sometimes cannot put the thoughts of a common letter into sane prose. Any work which I take upon myself as an engagement will act upon me to torment, *e.g.*, when I have undertaken, as three or four times I have, a school-boy copy of verses for Merchant Taylors' boys, at a guinea a copy, I have fretted over them, in perfect inability to do them, and have made my sister wretched with my wretchedness for a week together. The same, till by habit I have acquired a mechanical command, I have felt in making paragraphs. As to reviewing, in particular, my head is so whimsical a head, that I cannot, after reading another man's book, let it have been never so pleasing, give any account of it in any methodical way. I cannot follow his train. Something like this you must have perceived of me in conversation." Whether Lamb's review of the book was ever finished and printed I have not been able to discover.

## CHAPTER XXI

### 1804

The Unhappy Coleridge—He Leaves for Malta—Mary Lamb's Poems—Robert Lloyd's Marriage—Enter William Hazlitt—Lamb and Hazlitt Contrasted—Thomas De Quincey—Lamb in His Office—Artist Acquaintances.

THE year 1804 is remarkable for Coleridge's departure for Malta. For some time past he had been growing increasingly restless, and dissatisfied both with his home and himself: increasingly inclined to believe, like all unhappy irresolute characters, that if he could but change his environment and make a new start all would be well. In the summer of 1803 he had joined the Wordsworths on their Scotch tour—leaving them abruptly, it is conjectured to be able to drug himself unchecked, and then returning suddenly to Greta Hall, Keswick, to receive the Southeys who were not in the least the people to soothe him in the excitable state he was then in. Mrs. Coleridge's very natural impatience with her husband was probably encouraged rather than corrected by her sister, while Southey was the last person to sympathise either with a husband who neglected his wife or a literary man who did not fulfil his engagements.

Coleridge endured Keswick under these conditions until December 20th, when he started out to consult Poole. At Ambleside, however, he fell ill and was nursed by the Wordsworths into convalescence again, when he proceeded to London, saw Poole, and then, making his headquarters with Tobin at Barnard's Inn, did a little work for Stuart on the *Courier* and prepared for his great enterprise—to join Stoddart in Malta and see if salvation lay on that or some other Southern shore.

To what extent Coleridge saw Lamb we do not know; but there is an amusing letter extant, dated February 20th, 1804, to Southey, in which Coleridge describes a furious dis-

cussion at Godwin's, ending in bad temper, which he attributes largely to the "grossness and vulgar insanocecity of this dim-headed prig of a philosophocide" and partly to the "glass of punch of most deceitful strength" which Mary Lamb had mixed for him. I do not think, however, that Lamb and Coleridge were very much together at this time, for Lamb cannot have indulged in any great hopes of the benefits to be conferred upon his friend by such an exile, and Coleridge cannot have been unaware of Lamb's want of sympathy with what after all in its nakedness was an act of evasion.

With the assistance of Rickman a ship was at last found, and Coleridge left London for Portsmouth on March 27th, and sailed on April 9th. Writing to Sarah Stoddart in Malta in March, Mary Lamb says: "I envy your brother the pleasure of seeing Coleridge drop in unexpectedly upon him; we talk—but it is but wild and idle talk—of following him: he is to get my brother some little snug place of a thousand a year, and we are to leave all, and come and live among ye. What a pretty dream.

"Coleridge is very ill. I dread the thoughts of his long voyage—write as soon as he arrives, whether he does or not, and tell me how he is. . . .

"He has got letters of recommendation to Governor Ball, and God knows who; and he will talk and talk, and be universally admired. But I wish to write for him a *letter of recommendation* to Mrs. Stoddart, and to yourself, to take upon ye, on his first arrival, to be kind affectionate nurses; and mind, now, that you perform this duty faithfully, and write me a good account of yourself. Behave to him as you would to me, or to Charles, if we came sick and unhappy to you."

Coleridge reached Valetta on May 18th.

The next letter to Sarah Stoddart contains further testimony to Mary Lamb's shrewdness: "I make a point of conscience never to interfere or cross my brother in the humour he happens to be in. It always appears to me to be a vexatious kind of Tyranny, that women have no business to exercise over men, which, merely because *they having a better judgement*, they have the power to do. Let *men* alone, and at last we find they come round to the right way, which *we*, by a kind of intuition, perceive at once. But better, far better, that we should let them

often do wrong, than that they should have the torment of a Monitor always at their elbows."

On June 2nd Lamb sends to Dorothy Wordsworth two of his sister's poems, saying, "I wish they may please you: we in these parts are not a little proud of them." I quote here (from the final text of 1818) the "Dialogue between a Mother and Child," a little poem with an indefinable charm and a sense of tragedy that more conscious art might strive after in vain:—

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A MOTHER AND CHILD

CHILD

O Lady, lay your costly robes aside,
No longer may you glory in your pride.

MOTHER

Wherefore to-day art singing in mine ear
Sad songs, were made so long ago, my dear;
This day I am to be a bride, you know,
Why sing sad songs, were made so long ago?

CHILD

O, mother, lay your costly robes aside,
For you may never be another's bride.
*That* line I learn'd not in the old sad song.

MOTHER

I pray thee, pretty one, now hold thy tongue,
Play with the bride-maids, and be glad, my boy,
For thou shalt be a second father's joy.

CHILD

One father fondled me upon his knee.
One father is enough, alone, for me.

The other verses, on Leonardo da Vinci's "Modestia et Vanitas," will be found on page 158 of Vol. II.

In August and September the Lambs had a month's holiday at Richmond, wandering on the banks of the Thames, as he tells Robert Lloyd on September 13th: writing to congratulate him on his marriage (on August 2nd, 1804, to Hannah Hart, of Nottingham) and Priscilla Lloyd on her engagement. "All these new nuptials," he says, "do not make me unquiet in the perpetual prospect of celibacy. There is a quiet dignity in old bachelorhood, a leisure from cares, noise, etc., an enthronisation upon the armed-chair of a man's feeling that he may sit, walk,

read, unmolested, to none accountable—but hush! or I shall be torn in pieces like a churlish Orpheus by the young married women and bride-maids of Birmingham."

A letter from Mary Lamb to Mrs. Coleridge on October 13th contains an interesting announcement and a charming passage. "I have lately been often talking of you with Mrs. Hazlitt. William Hazlitt is painting my brother's picture, which has brought us acquainted with the whole family. I like William Hazlitt and his sister very much indeed, and I think Mrs. Hazlitt a pretty good-humoured woman. She has a nice little girl of the Pypos[1] kind, who is so fond of my brother that she stops strangers in the street to tell them when *Mr. Lamb is coming to see her*."—I know of no incident in Lamb's life, or in any one's life, that is prettier than this.

In later chapters will be found further evidence of Lamb's popularity with children; here it is more important to note that with this letter William Hazlitt, with whose name that of Lamb is so closely linked in English literature, enters the circle. They had met before—possibly, I think, in the early months of this year, while Coleridge was in town, for it was Coleridge (whom Hazlitt had already painted) that brought them together. The meeting place is said by Hazlitt to have been Godwin's house, at a moment when that philosopher, Coleridge and Holcroft were discussing "man as he is and man as he ought to be." "Give me," interjected Lamb, who was taking little part in the debate, "give me man as he ought not to be;" and Hazlitt at once realised that here was a new friend to be added to his too slender store.

Hazlitt's twenty-seventh birthday was in April of this year; Lamb's in February. Hazlitt, like Lamb, was the youngest of a large family, only three of whom grew up—John, Peggy and the essayist. His father was a Unitarian minister at Wem, in Shropshire; Lamb too had been brought up in a Unitarian atmosphere. In taste they had much in common: both loved literature, both loved painting, both talked well and hated cant. Both had sat in a manner at the feet of Coleridge: Lamb as we have seen, Hazlitt at Wem, in 1798, as he tells us in the essay "My First Acquaintance with Poets." Both knew Words-

[1] Pypos was the pet name for Derwent Coleridge, derived from his attempts to say "Flying Opossum."

worth, whom Hazlitt had painted on his recent northern tour; Hazlitt, according to De Quincey, had even fallen in love with Wordsworth's sister.

In 1804 Hazlitt was beginning to realise that the career of a painter was not for him—his portrait of Lamb is one of his last pictures—and he was preparing to settle down to a literary career. At the time we have reached he had already written and published his *Essay on Human Action*, and his abridgment of Tucker's *Light of Nature Revealed* was begun.

Each man was ripe for the other, and for a while their intimacy was close and cordial. But although Lamb never wavered in his admiration of Hazlitt's intellectual gifts—though he thought him in his saner moments "one of the finest spirits breathing"—Hazlitt made it very difficult for the flame of friendship to burn with any steady radiance. Indeed he made no friends in the ultimate sense of the word. He valued too much his independence, the right to say what he thought. He was one who said what was in his mind regardless of consequences, and he would never have brooked such an impediment to this luxury as a bond of love. Lamb also spoke his mind plainly, as he himself tells us; but Lamb was more catholic—he liked man as he ought not to be; and since he too had suffered, his plain speech was seldom unkind. It may often have been misunderstood, as every witty man's is certain to be, but it was never cruel. Hazlitt was critical to the uttermost fibre; he accepted nothing exactly as it was; he condemned roundly, and when he praised, praised usually by comparison. Tolerance was his bugbear. What he disliked he hated and despised. To hate may be a virtue, but to despise is a confession of failure as a philosopher and a citizen of the world; and Hazlitt's readiness to despise was his weakest point: it has kept him out of men's hearts as surely as Lamb's inability to despise has established his place there.

As Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, Hazlitt's grandson, has remarked, Lamb was too tolerant to possess Hazlitt's entire commendation. The word loyalty was not in Hazlitt's dictionary; it was in italics in Lamb's. Not that Lamb was blind to a friend's faults or unwilling to speak of them—as we saw in the letter to Rickman about George Burnett—but the faults were never allowed to alienate. Hazlitt on the contrary demanded that his friends

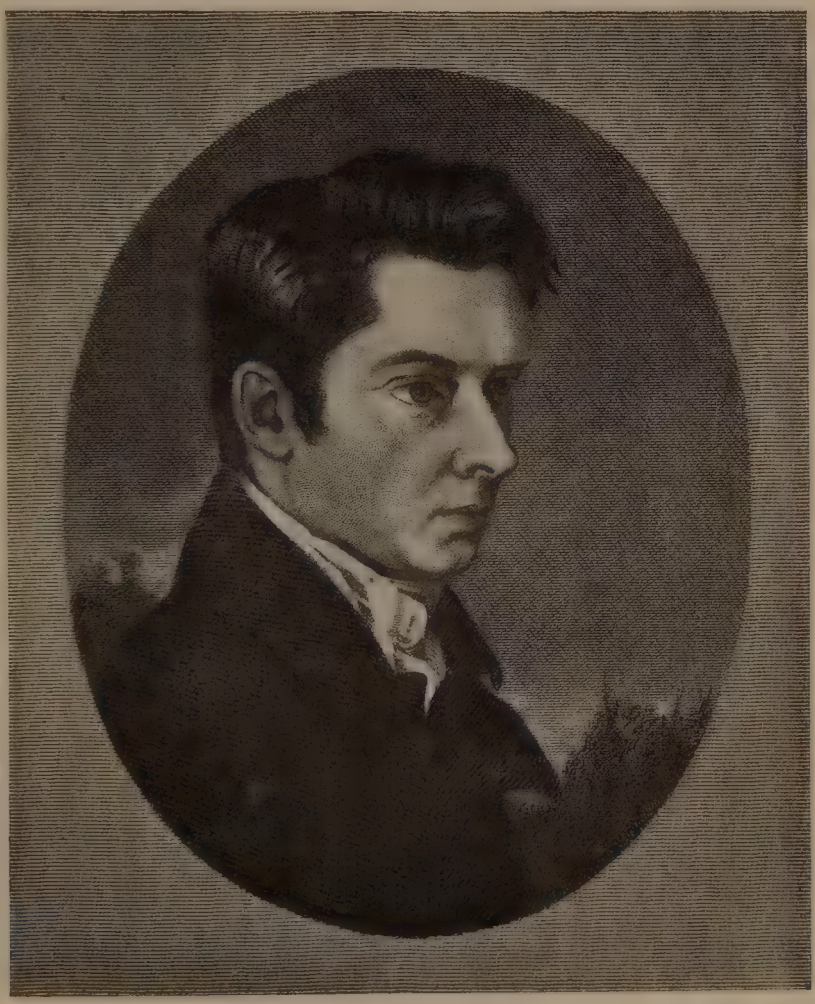
should go with him all the way: hate where he hated, praise where he praised, cut where he cut. Lamb was too much interested in his fellows to forgo their company because they held other views; he was in all the camps where whatever was interesting abode. Hazlitt had but one camp, his own.

There is a story of Lamb related by Crabb Robinson which bears upon the matter. "How I hate those Blanks!" he once remarked in Robinson's hearing. "But you have never seen them," said Robinson. "No," Lamb replied, "that's just it. That's why I hate them. I can never hate any one that I've once seen." Hazlitt on the contrary nursed his faculties of hate with the utmost care and fondness. Lamb knew that in every one was some point of sympathy if only it could be found. Hazlitt might not have denied the fact, but he preferred not to find it. It is too much to say that Lamb was social in any great degree, although he was very happy among his friends; but Hazlitt was positively anti-social.

Again, Lamb's Shakespearian mind recognised law; he kept office hours; he never ran away. Hazlitt kept no hours, recognised no laws, often ran away. Lamb had very little of the literary temperament: he was man and brother first and writer now and then; Hazlitt was steeped in ink. Naturally disposed to extreme views and uncharitable verdicts, Hazlitt nourished and fostered such defects by his plunge into politics.

Although Hazlitt may not reach the heart, his place in our heads is as secure as Lamb's. English literature possesses no acuter mind than Hazlitt's, no surer hand; yet for every reader of Hazlitt there are scores of readers of Lamb—a result which may be attributed to Hazlitt's lack of sympathetic companionableness. He says the wisest, the truest things; but there is more friendliness in a page of Lamb than in all Hazlitt's writings. Hazlitt has no tendrils; he makes us think, but he never enfolds us.

In *My Friends and Acquaintances* by P. G. Patmore, who knew both men, is this interesting passage: "From Lamb, and from Lamb alone, among all his friends and associates, Hazlitt had never received, or even suspected, except on one occasion, any of those personal slights and marks of disrespect which he did not feel or fear the less because he was conscious of often deserving them—using the phrase in its ordinary and social acceptation. From Lamb alone, his errors, extravagancies, and



WILLIAM HAZLITT (AGED 30)

FROM A MINIATURE BY JOHN HAZLITT

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inconsistencies, met with that wise and just consideration which his fine sense of the weakness no less than the strength of our human nature dictated. There was no one who spoke more *freely* of Hazlitt, whether behind his back or before his face, than Lamb did; but Lamb never spoke *disparagingly* of him. Lamb, in canvassing the faults of his character, never failed to bear in mind, and call to mind in others, the rare and admirable qualities by which they were accompanied, and with which, it may be, they were naturally and therefore inextricably linked. No wonder, then, that Hazlitt felt towards Lamb a sentiment of personal kindness and esteem that was not extended, even in kind, to any other individual."

Lamb's remarks on Hazlitt are extremely valuable in helping to a judgment of that fine and wayward genius. They are to be found principally in the correspondence, but there is the famous reference in the open letter to Southey in 1823: "I stood well with him for fifteen years (the proudest of my life), and have ever spoke my full mind of him to some, to whom his panegyric must naturally be least tasteful. I never in thought swerved from him, I never betrayed him, I never slackened in my admiration of him, I was the same to him (neither better nor worse) though he could not see it, as in the days when he thought fit to trust me. At this instant, he may be preparing for me some compliment, above my deserts, as he has sprinkled many such among his admirable books, for which I rest his debtor; or, for any thing I know, or can guess to the contrary, he may be about to read a lecture on my weaknesses. He is welcome to them (as he was to my humble hearth), if they can divert a spleen, or ventilate a fit of sullenness. I wish he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does; but the reconciliation must be effected by himself, and I despair of living to see that day. But, protesting against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do; judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long, and relished so deeply; or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes—I should belie my own conscience, if I said less, than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy, which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting

to find, such another companion." And in 1816 Lamb had written to Wordsworth, after mentioning an attack on himself by Hazlitt that had recently been printed: "In spite of all there is something tough in my attachment to H. which these violent strainings cannot quite dislocate or sever asunder. I get no conversation in London that is absolutely worth attending to but his."

In the winter of 1804—or possibly the beginning of 1805—Lamb first met another writer who was destined to appreciate his genius as cordially as any, and to make (for those who can extricate them from their surrounding word-brambles) some valuable contributions to his full-length portrait. This was Thomas De Quincey, then a young man of nineteen, who had already known more adventures than fall to most men in fifty years—having run away from school, starved in London with Ann, corresponded with Wordsworth, learned to eat opium, and read half the books in the world. A literary friend had given him a letter of introduction to Lamb, whom he knew as the author of *John Woodvil* and the imitations of Burton, and he presented it at the East India House. I quote in full, from "London Reminiscences," the tortuous account of this first meeting, because it is the only glimpse we have of Lamb at his work.

"But first let me describe my brief introductory call upon him at the India House. I had been told that he was never to be found at home except in the evenings; and to have called then would have been, in a manner, forcing myself upon his hospitalities, and at a moment when he might have confidential friends about him; besides that, he was sometimes tempted away to the theatres. I went, therefore, to the India House; made inquiries amongst the servants; and, after some trouble (for *that* was early in his Leadenhall Street career, and possibly he was not much known), I was shown into a small room, or else a small section of a large one (thirty-four years affect one's remembrance of some circumstances), in which was a very lofty writing-desk, separated by a still higher railing from that part of the floor on which the profane—the laity, like myself—were allowed to approach the *clerus*, or clerkly rulers of the room.[1] Within the railing sat, to the best of my remembrance, six quill-driving gentlemen; not gentlemen whose duty or profession it was

[1] See page 310.

merely to drive the quill, but who were then driving it—*gens de plume*, such *in esse*, as well as *in posse*—in act as well as habit; for, as if they supposed me a spy sent by some superior power to report upon the situation of affairs as surprised by me, they were all too profoundly immersed in their oriental studies to have any sense of my presence. Consequently, I was reduced to a necessity of announcing myself and my errand. I walked, therefore, into one of the two open doorways of the railing, and stood closely by the high stool of him who occupied the first place within the little aisle. I touched his arm, by way of recalling him from his lofty Leadenhall speculations to this sublunary world; and, presenting my letter, asked if that gentleman (pointing to the address) were really a citizen of the present room; for I had been repeatedly misled, by the directions given me, into wrong rooms. The gentleman smiled; it was a smile not to be forgotten. This was Lamb. And here occurred a *very, very* little incident—one of those which pass so fugitively that they are gone and hurrying away into Lethe almost before your attention can have arrested them; but it was an incident which to me, who happened to notice it, served to express the courtesy and delicate consideration of Lamb's manners. The seat upon which he sat was a very high one; so absurdly high, by the way, that I can imagine no possible use or sense in such an altitude, unless it were to restrain the occupant from playing truant at the fire by opposing Alpine difficulties to his descent.

"Whatever might be the original purpose of this aspiring seat, one serious dilemma arose from it, and this it was which gave the occasion to Lamb's act of courtesy. Somewhere there is an anecdote, meant to illustrate the ultra-obsequiousness of the man,—either I have heard of it in connection with some actual man known to myself, or it is told in a book of some historical coxcomb—that, being on horseback, and meeting some person or other whom it seemed advisable to flatter, he actually dismounted, in order to pay his court by a more ceremonious bow. In Russia, as we all know, this was at one time, upon meeting any of the Imperial family, an act of legal necessity; and there, accordingly, but there only, it would have worn no ludicrous aspect. Now, in this situation of Lamb's, the act of descending from his throne, a very elaborate process, with steps and stages analogous to those on horseback—of slipping your

right foot out of the stirrup, throwing your leg over the crupper, &c.—was, to all intents and purposes, the same thing as dismounting from a great elephant of a horse. Therefore it both was, and was felt to be by Lamb, supremely ludicrous. On the other hand, to have sat still and stately upon this aerial station, to have bowed condescendingly from this altitude, would have been—not ludicrous indeed; performed by a very superb person, and supported by a very superb bow, it might have been vastly fine, and even terrifying to many young gentlemen under sixteen; but it would have had an air of ungentlemanly assumption. Between these extremes, therefore, Lamb had to choose;—between appearing ridiculous himself for a moment, by going through a ridiculous evolution which no man could execute with grace; or, on the other hand, appearing lofty and assuming, in a degree which his truly humble nature (for he was the humblest of men in the pretensions which he put forward for himself) must have shrunk from with horror. Nobody who knew Lamb can doubt how the problem was solved; he began to dismount instantly; and, as it happened that the very first *round* of his descent obliged him to turn his back upon me as if for a sudden purpose of flight, he had an excuse for laughing; which he did heartily—saying, at the same time something to this effect: that I must not judge from first appearances; that he should revolve upon me; that he was not going to fly; and other facetiæ, which challenged a general laugh from the clerical brotherhood."

An invitation to spend the evening with the Lambs followed, and De Quincey gladly went; but his account is even more laboured and not very entertaining. Lamb seems to have been mischievously disposed to wound the too tender susceptibilities of his young Oxford friend by making some very Philistine comments on the "Ancient Mariner" which De Quincey (as well as Lamb, at heart,) held sacred. "At length, when he had given utterance to some ferocious canon of judgment, which seemed to question the entire value of the poem, I said, perspiring (I dare say) in this detestable crisis—'But, Mr. Lamb, good heavens! how is it possible you can allow yourself in such opinions? What instance could you bring from the poem that would bear you out in these insinuations?' 'Instances!' said Lamb: 'Oh, I'll instance you, if you come to that. Instance, indeed! Pray, what do say to this—

"The many men so beautiful,
And they all dead did lie?"

*So beautiful*, indeed! Beautiful! Just think of such a gang of Wapping vagabonds, all covered with pitch, and chewing tobacco; and the old gentleman himself—what do you call him—the bright-eyed fellow?' What more might follow I never heard; for, at this point, in a perfect rapture of horror, I raised my hands—both hands—to both ears; and, without stopping to think or to apologise, I endeavoured to restore equanimity to my disturbed sensibilities by shutting out all further knowledge of Lamb's impieties. At length, he seemed to have finished; so I, on my part, thought I might venture to take off the embargo: and in fact he *had* ceased; but no sooner did he find me restored to my hearing than he said with a most sarcastic smile—which he could assume upon occasion—'If you please, sir, we'll say grace before we begin.' I know not whether Lamb were really piqued or not at the mode by which I had expressed my disturbance: Miss Lamb certainly was not; her goodness led her to pardon me, and to treat me—in whatever light she might really view my almost involuntary rudeness—as the party who had suffered wrong; and, for the rest of the evening, she was so pointedly kind and conciliatory in her manner that I felt greatly ashamed of my boyish failure in self-command."

We shall meet with De Quincey again from time to time. As I have said, he always wrote heartily and in the highest terms of Lamb, but I doubt if Lamb cared much for him. The intimacy was never ripe.

George Dawe, R.A., whom Lamb in 1831 memorialised with a frankness that might too easily be mistaken for malice, was another acquaintance in these days. Lamb met him, I think, at the rooms of Henry Rogers, the banker-poet's youngest brother, where he met also Daniels, Westall and Stothard. Dawe, as we know, he used to visit in his studio, but I defer the account of him until the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XXII

### *THE KING AND QUEEN OF HEARTS*

### 1805

The Death of John Wordsworth—Mary Lamb's Illness—Lamb's Praise of His Sister—Bridget Elia—First Praises of Pig—The "Farewell to Tobacco"—Correspondence with Hazlitt—George Dawe in His Studio.

THE year 1805 is chiefly remarkable for containing what was, so far as we know, Lamb's first literary work for children—the tiny book of rhymes and pictures known as *The King and Queen of Hearts*. In this year the Godwins, casting about for a means of adding to their income, decided to set up a juvenile publishing business, which should issue Godwin's own books for children (written under the name of Edward Baldwin) and such others as could be obtained. In order that no stigma of freethought might rest upon the firm, to its discredit in the eyes of parents and purchasers, the name of Godwin was at the first suppressed and a manager was found to act as a figure-head. This manager was one Thomas Hodgkins, who at midsummer 1805 was established in a little house in Hanway Street, off Oxford Street. I imagine that one of Godwin's first acts after the publishing business was decided upon was to invite the Lambs to write for the new firm; and Lamb's verses to accompany William Mulready's very crude drawings to the old story of the King and Queen of Hearts must have been among the earliest works that were arranged.

*The King and Queen of Hearts* was the first of a series known as the Copperplate Series—one shilling plain and eighteen-pence coloured. The first copy that came to light in 1901, when Lamb's participation in it was proved, was dated 1809, and it produced £226 at public auction; the second, dated 1806, was run up to £240. The verses are merry but

*Charles Lamb (in his Thirtieth Year)*
*in the dress of a Lincoln's Inn Student*
*From the painting by William Hazlitt*

very slight, and, except as constituting Lamb's earliest known attempt to write for children, are negligible. In 1806 we shall come to a more serious effort in juvenile literature, also written for the Godwins, a production on which some of Charles Lamb's and most of Mary Lamb's fame securely rests.

The early months of 1805 were saddened to the Lambs, as to several of their friends, by the tragic death of Captain Wordsworth, the poet's brother, who was drowned in the sinking of his ship, the East Indiaman *Earl of Abergavenny*, off Portland Bill on February 5th. Two hundred persons also lost their lives by this calamity. John Wordsworth, whose character to some extent inspired his brother's poem "The Happy Warrior," was only thirty-three. Lamb, from his position in the East India House, was able to give Wordsworth information about his brother's last moments; which he did in a series of letters now preserved in the Wordsworth family. In his first letter, after repeating the testimony of certain survivors to the captain's courageous sense of duty, he says, "We have done nothing but think of you, particularly of Dorothy. Mary is crying by me while I with difficulty write this: but as long as we remember any thing, we shall remember your Brother's noble person, and his sensible manly modest voice, and how safe and comfortable we all were together in our apartment, where I am now writing." In a letter recently made public from Dorothy Wordsworth to Mrs. Clarkson the gratitude of herself and her brother to their friends in the Temple is very feelingly expressed.

From Mary Lamb's long letter to Dorothy Wordsworth on May 7th, 1805, I may quote a touching and beautifully simple passage: "That you would see every object with, and through your lost brother, and that that would at last become a real and everlasting source of comfort to you, I felt, and well knew from my own experience in sorrow, but till you yourself began to feel this I did not dare tell you so, but I send you some poor lines which I wrote under this conviction of mind, and before I heard Coleridge was returning home. I will transcribe them now before I finish my letter, lest a false shame prevent me then, for I know they are much worse than they ought to be, written as they were with strong feeling and on such a subject. Every line seems to me to be borrowed, but I had no better

way of expressing my thoughts, and I never have the power of altering or amending anything I have once laid aside with dissatisfaction.

> Why is he wandering on the sea?
> Coleridge should now with Wordsworth be.
> By slow degrees he'd steal away
> Their woe, and gently bring a ray
> (So happily he'd time relief)
> Of comfort from their very grief.
> He'd tell them that their brother dead,
> When years have passed o'er their head,
> Will be remember'd with such holy,
> True, and perfect melancholy,
> That ever this lost brother John
> Will be their heart's companion.
> His voice they'll always hear, his face they'll always see,
> There's nought in life so sweet as such a memory."

Very soon afterwards Mary Lamb was taken ill; and though Lamb attributes the cause largely to late hours, we may, knowing how tender were her sensibilities and how quick her sympathy with others, assume that the Wordsworths' trouble was not unrelated to this attack. In telling Dorothy Wordsworth the news Charles Lamb says (June 14th, 1805): "I have every reason to suppose that this illness, like all her former ones, will be but temporary; but I cannot always feel so. Meantime she is dead to me, and I miss a prop. All my strength is gone, and I am like a fool, bereft of her co-operation. I dare not think, lest I should think wrong; so used am I to look up to her in the least and the biggest perplexity. To say *all that* I know of her would be more than I think any body could believe or ever understand; and when I hope to have her well again with me it would be sinning against her feelings to go about to praise her: for I can conceal nothing that I do from her. She is older, and wiser, and better, than me, and all my wretched imperfections I cover to myself by resolutely thinking on her goodness. She would share life and death, heaven and hell, with me. She lives but for me. And I know I have been wasting and teazing her life for five years past incessantly with my cursed drinking and ways of going on. But even in this up-braiding of myself I am offending against her, for I know that she has cleaved to me for better, for worse;

and if the balance has been against her hitherto, it was a noble trade."

This is one of the first of Lamb's many beautiful passages of praise of his sister; and though the character sketch of Bridget Elia in the *Elia* essay "Mackery End" belongs to a later date, I am led to quote it here, beside the testimony of this letter, in order that at this stage a fuller sense of Mary Lamb's very interesting personality may be ours. In 1805, I should add, Mary Lamb was in her forty-first year, by which time she would probably have perfected most of her idiosyncracies. "Bridget Elia," wrote Lamb of his sister, in 1821, "has been my housekeeper for many a long year. I have obligations to Bridget, extending beyond the period of memory. We house together, old bachelor and maid, in a sort of double singleness; with such tolerable comfort, upon the whole, that I, for one, find in myself no sort of disposition to go out upon the mountains, with the rash king's offspring, to bewail my celibacy. We agree pretty well in our tastes and habits—yet so, as 'with a difference'. We are generally in harmony, with occasional bickerings—as it should be among near relations. Our sympathies are rather understood, than expressed; and once, upon my dissembling a tone in my voice more kind than ordinary, my cousin burst into tears, and complained that I was altered. We are both great readers in different directions. While I am hanging over (for the thousandth time) some passage in old Burton, or one of his strange contemporaries, she is abstracted in some modern tale, or adventure, whereof our common reading-table is daily fed with assiduously fresh supplies. . . .

"My cousin has a native disrelish of any thing that sounds odd or bizarre. Nothing goes down with her, that is quaint, irregular, or out of the road of common sympathy. She 'holds Nature more clever.' I can pardon her blindness to the beautiful obliquities of the Religio Medici; but she must apologise to me for certain disrespectful insinuations, which she has been pleased to throw out latterly, touching the intellectuals of a dear favourite of mine, of the last century but one—the thrice noble, chaste, and virtuous,—but again somewhat fantastical, and original-brain'd, generous Margaret Newcastle.

"It has been the lot of my cousin, oftener perhaps than I could have wished, to have had for her associates and mine, free-thinkers

—leaders, and disciples, of novel philosophies and systems; but she neither wrangles with, nor accepts, their opinions. That which was good and venerable to her, when a child, retains its authority over her mind still. She never juggles or plays tricks with her understanding.

"We are both of us inclined to be a little too positive; and I have observed the result of our disputes to be almost uniformly this—that in matters of fact, dates, and circumstances, it turns out, that I was in the right, and my cousin in the wrong. But where we have differed upon moral points; upon something proper to be done, or let alone; whatever heat of opposition, or steadiness of conviction, I set out with, I am sure always, in the long run, to be brought over to her way of thinking.

"I must touch upon the foibles of my kinswoman with a gentle hand, for Bridget does not like to be told of her faults. She hath an awkward trick (to say no worse of it) of reading in company: at which times she will answer *yes* or *no* to a question, without fully understanding its purport—which is provoking, and derogatory in the highest degree to the dignity of the putter of the said question. Her presence of mind is equal to the most pressing trials of life, but will sometimes desert her upon trifling occasions. When the purpose requires it, and is a thing of moment, she can speak to it greatly; but in matters which are not stuff of the conscience, she hath been known sometimes to let slip a word less seasonably."

Mary Lamb's 1805 illness was a long one, for when writing to Manning on July 27th Lamb was still waiting for her return. Probably she came home early in August. There was no long holiday this year; only two short excursions, to Egham and to a "place near Harrow."

I must go back a few months at this point to interpolate a few sentences from the letter to Manning in February, in which Lamb utters his first praise of Pig—in the shape of a brawn which Manning had sent from Cambridge: "'Tis of all my hobbies the supreme in the eating way. He might have sent sops from the pan, skimmings, crumplets, chips, hog's lard, the tender brown judiciously scalped from a fillet of veal (dexterously replaced by a salamander), the tops of asparagus, fugitive livers, runaway gizzards of fowls, the eyes of martyred pigs, tender effusions of laxative woodcocks, the red spawn of lobsters, leverets' ears, and

such pretty filchings common to cooks; but these had been ordinary presents, the everyday courtesies of dishwashers to their sweethearts. Brawn was a noble thought. It is not every common gullet-fancier that can properly esteem it. It is like a picture of one of the choice old Italian masters. Its gusto is of that hidden sort. As Wordsworth sings of a modest poet,—'you must love him, ere to you he will seem worthy of your love;' so brawn, you must taste it, ere to you it will seem to have any taste at all. But 'tis nuts to the adept: those that will send out their tongues and feelers to find it out. It will be wooed, and not unsought be won. Now, ham-essence, lobsters, turtle, such popular minions, absolutely *court you*, lay themselves out to strike you at first smack, like one of David's pictures (they call him *Darveed*), compared with the plain russet-coated wealth of a Titian or a Correggio, as I illustrated above. Such are the obvious glaring heathen virtues of a corporation dinner, compared with the reserved collegiate worth of brawn."

Lamb's letter to Wordsworth of September 28th indicates a revival of literary activity. He encloses the "Farewell to Tobacco" and mentions the project of farce-writing. "I have done nothing since the beginning of last year, when I lost my newspaper job, and having had a long idleness, I must do something, or we shall get very poor!" (Lamb's salary in 1805 was £120, to which was added the usual India House gratuity, amounting then to about £50, a sum of £10 for holidays, and a little extra-work money as well, bringing the total to about £200.)

He remarks of the "Farewell to Tobacco": "Now you have got it, you have got all my store [of poetry] for I have absolutely not another line. No more has Mary. We have nobody about us that cares for Poetry, and who will rear grapes when he shall be the sole eater? Perhaps if you encourage us to shew you what we may write, we may do something now and then before we absolutely forget the quantity of an English line for want of practice. The 'Tobacco,' being a little in the way of Wither (whom Southey so much likes) perhaps you will somehow convey it to him with my kind remembrances. Then, everybody will have seen it that I wish to see it: I have sent it to Malta."

Lamb also says, in the same letter, "We have neither of us been very well for some weeks past. I am very nervous, and she

most so at those times when I am: so that a merry friend, adverting to the noble consolation we were able to afford each other, denominated us not unaptly Gum Boil and Tooth Ache: for they use to say that a Gum Boil is a great relief to a Tooth Ache." The joke was repeated by Mary Lamb in one of her letters to Sarah Stoddart, who, it seems, having had difficulty in agreeing with her brother in Malta, had returned to England and had been entrusted by him to Mary Lamb's care in London, when she could get away from her mother at Salisbury.

In the same letter Mary Lamb remarked, "If I possibly can, I will prevail upon Charles to write to your brother by the conveyance you mention; but he is so unwell, I almost fear the fortnight will slip away before I can get him in the right vein. Indeed, it has been sad and heavy times with us lately: when I am pretty well, his low spirits throws me back again; and when he begins to get a little chearful, then I do the same kind office for him. I heartily wish for the arrival of Coleridge; a few such evenings as we have sometimes passed with him would wind us up, and set us a going again.

"Do not say any thing, when you write, of our low spirits—it will vex Charles. You would laugh, or you would cry, perhaps both, to see us sit together, looking at each other with long and rueful faces, and saying, 'how do you do?' and 'how do you do?' and then we fall a-crying, and say we will be better on the morrow."

The last important letter of 1805 is to Hazlitt, who had left London for a while and was busy upon his abridgement of Tucker's *Light of Nature* and probably also meditating his *Free Thoughts on Public Affairs*. From Lamb's gossip we find that he is in the midst of reading Webster's "White Devil," in the course of his researches among the old dramas for the Dramatic Specimens, a work which we may suppose him to be fitfully considering, although it was not published until 1808. He speaks also of Rickman's wife, Rickman having married Susannah Postlethwaite, of Harting, in Sussex, on October 30th; of Nelson's death—"I have followed him in fancy ever since I saw him walking in Pall Mall (I was prejudiced against him before) looking just as a Hero should look"; of a £20 lottery prize which the Lambs had drawn—"alas!! are both yours blanks?"; and of Louisa Martin—"Some things too about

Monkey, which can't so well be written—how it set up for a fine Lady, and thought it had got Lovers, and was obliged to be convinc'd of its age from the parish register, where it was proved to be only twelve; and an edict issued that it should not give itself airs yet these four years: and how it got leave to be called Miss, by grace." This is our first glimpse of Louisa Martin, who seems to have been an especial favourite of Lamb's. Two copies of verses at least he addressed to her—"The Ape," 1806, and "To Louisa M—— whom I used to call 'Monkey'" in 1831. I have discovered nothing of the family. In a letter to Wordsworth in 1834, to which we shall come later, Lamb speaks of Louisa Martin, then a middle-aged woman, in the highest terms of esteem and friendship.

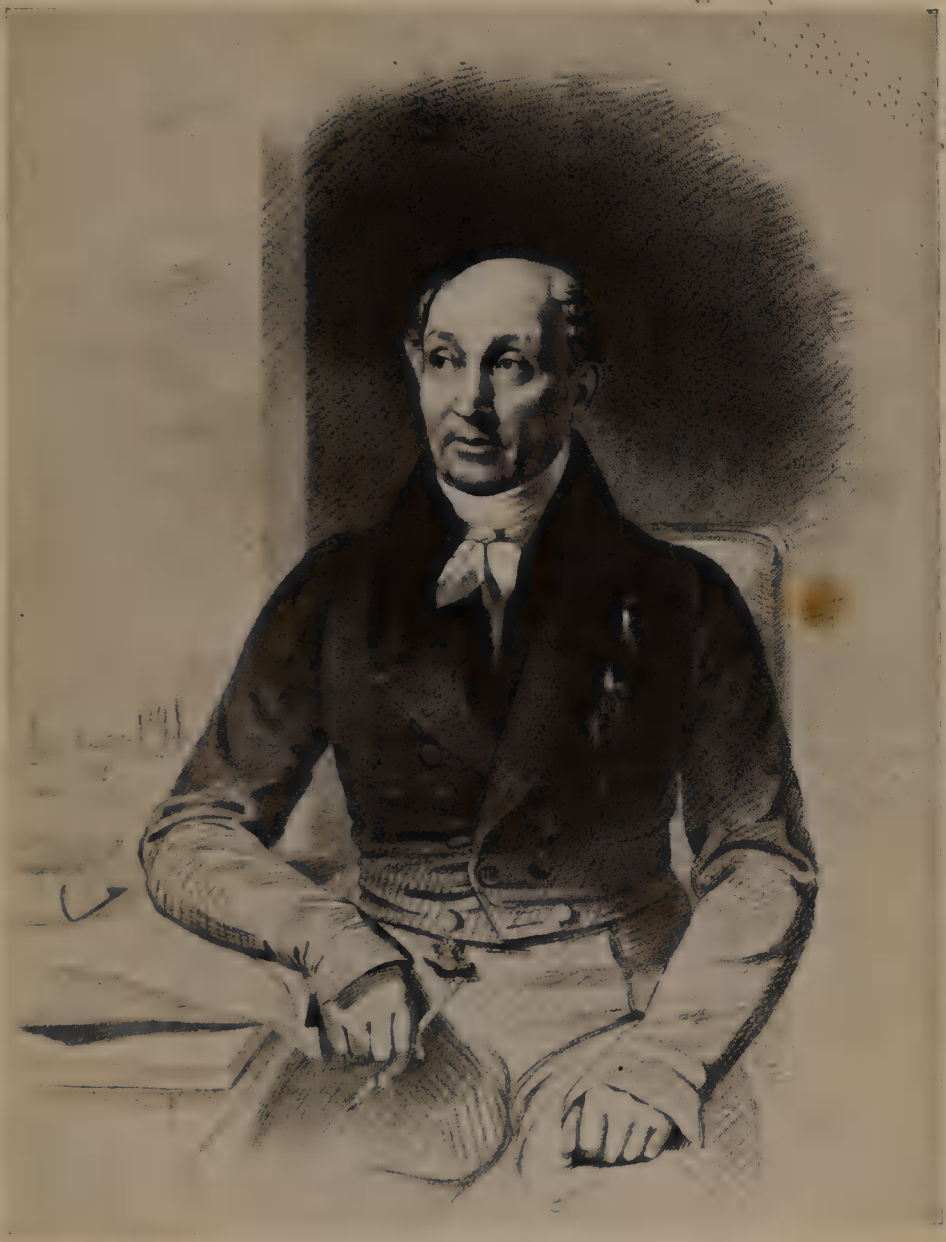
The letter also contains a reference to George Dawe, the painter, and since Lamb's acquaintanceship with this odd creature seems to have belonged mainly to this period, I may here fittingly introduce his character-sketch. Dawe, whom Lamb came to know probably through Godwin, one of his early sitters, was born in 1781, was thus by six years Lamb's junior, and was in 1805 only twenty-four. "My acquaintance with D. was in the outset of his art, when the graving tools, rather than the pencil, administered to his humble wants. Those implements, as is well known, are not the most favourable to the cultivation of that virtue, which is esteemed next to godliness. He might 'wash his hands in innocency,' and so metaphorically 'approach an altar;' but his material puds were any thing but fit to be carried to church. By an ingrained economy in soap—if it was not for pictorial effect rather—he would wash (on Sundays) the inner oval, or portrait, as it may be termed, of his countenance, leaving the unwashed temples to form a natural black frame round a picture, in which a dead white was the predominant colour. This, with the addition of green spectacles, made necessary by the impairment, which his graving labours by day and night (for he was ordinarily at them for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four) had brought upon his visual faculties, gave him a singular appearance, when he took the air abroad; in so much, that I have seen a crowd of young men and boys following him along Oxford-street with admiration, not without shouts; even as the Youth of Rome, we read in Vasari, followed the steps of Raphael with acclamations for his genius, and for his beauty,

when he proceeded from his work-shop to chat with Cardinals and Popes at the Vatican. . . .

"So entirely devoid of imagination, or any feeling for his high art, was this *Painter*, that for the few historical pictures he attempted, any sitter might sit for any character. He took once for a subject *The Infant Hercules*. Did he chuse for a model some robust antique? No. He did not even pilfer from Sir Joshua, who was nearer to his own size. But from a *show* he hired to sit to him a child in years indeed, (though no Infant,) but in fact a precocious *Man*, or human portent, that was disgustingly exhibiting at that period; a thing to be strangled. From this he formed *his* Infant Hercules. In a scriptural flight he next attempted a Sampson in the lap of Dalilah. A Dalilah of some sort was procureable for love or money, but who should stand for the Jewish Hercules? He hired a tolerably stout porter, with a thickish head of hair, curling in yellowish locks, but lithe—much like a wig. And these were the robust strengths of Sampson.

"I once was witness to a *family scene* in his painting closet, which I had entered rather abruptly, and but for his encouragement, should as hastily have retreated. He stood with displeased looks eyeing a female relative—whom I had known under happier auspices—that was kneeling at his feet with a baby in her arms, with her eyes uplifted and suppliant. Though I could have previously sworn to the virtue of Miss ——, yet casual slips have been known. There are such things as families disgraced, where least you would have expected it. The child *might* be ——; I had heard of no wedding—I was the last person to pry into family secrets—when D. relieved my uneasy cogitations by explaining, that the innocent, good-humoured creature before me (such as she ever was, and is now that she is married) with a baby borrowed from the public house, was acting Andromache to *his* Ulysses, for the purpose of transferring upon canvas a tender situation from the Troades of Seneca."

As adventures are to the adventurous, so were the George Dawes and George Dyers to Charles Lamb.



GEORGE DAWE (AGED 50)

## CHAPTER XXIII

### 1806

Fenwick and Fell Again—Lamb at a Critical Age—Picture Galleries—"Pink" De Quincey and the Lambs—Manning Leaves for China—The *Tales from Shakespear* Begun—"Mr. H." Accepted—Basil Montagu—Hazlitt, Misogynist — Coleridge in Malta and Italy — "Mr. H." Played — and Damned—Hogsflesh in Real Life—Robert William Elliston—Enter Henry Crabb Robinson—Lamb and Coleridge at the Colliers'.

AN unusual degree of literary activity marks the year 1806, in which the farce of which Lamb had been thinking for some time was not only written but performed, and the *Tales from Shakespear* were written.

In the earliest letter of the year—to Hazlitt, on January 15th—Lamb says that Miss Stoddart is with them on a three weeks' visit: probably thus first bringing to Hazlitt's notice the name of the lady who was to become his wife. Lamb also remarks that Fenwick is coming to town (if no kind angel intervene) to try for the rules of the Fleet Prison for debtors, while Fell is bound for Newgate, and his wife and four children to the poor-house. He adds, "Plenty of reflection and motives of gratitude to the wise disposer of all things in *us*, whose prudent conduct has hitherto ensured us a warm fire and snug roof over our heads. *Nullum numen abest si sit Prudentia.* Alas! Prudentia is in the last quarter of her tutelary shining over me. A little time and I —— But may be I may, at last, hit upon some mode of collecting some of the vast superfluities of this money-voiding town. Much is to be got, and I don't want much. All I ask is time and leisure; and I am cruelly off for them."

Fell apparently avoided Newgate (the allusion to which may well have been a joke), for on January 25th we find Lamb asking Rickman to find him a place. He describes him as a "young man of solid but not brilliant genius . . . who would bind himself by a terrible oath never to imagine himself an

extraordinary genius again"—and with this comment Fell drops out of Lamb's life.

Writing to Hazlitt on February 19th Lamb says, "Have taken a room at 3/- a week, to be in between 5 and 8 at night, to avoid my *nocturnal*—alias *knock-eternal*—visitors." He adds that the farce "Mr. H." which was written, or finished, in this room, goes to the manager to-morrow. Where the three-shilling room was situated I do not know—perhaps in the Temple—but to Lamb's mention of it is due, I fancy, some of the misconception that has arisen with regard to his poverty. In the same letter he tells Hazlitt that having smoked ten pipes the night before, he is really giving up tobacco. But we shall meet again with this decision and good intention. Writing to Sarah Stoddart on February 20th, or thereabouts, Mary Lamb remarks humorously that that day is nothing in particular—"not a birthday . . . nor a leave-off-smoking day."

Incidentally in this letter Mary Lamb remarks, with her characteristic kindly good sense: "It is well enough, when one is talking to a friend, to edge in an odd word by way of counsel now and then; but there is something mighty irksome in its staring upon one in a letter, where one ought only to see kind words and friendly remembrances."

In her next letter we have news of her brother's restlessness at this time: "The reason why I have not had any time to spare, is because Charles has given himself some hollidays after the hard labour of finishing his farce, and, therefore, I have had none of the evening leisure I promised myself. Next week he promises to go to work again. I wish he may happen to hit upon some new plan, to his mind, for another farce: when once begun, I do not fear his perseverance, but the hollidays he has allowed himself, I fear, will unsettle him. I look forward to next week with the same kind of anxiety I did to the first entrance at the new lodging. We have had, as you know, so many teasing anxieties of late, that I have got a kind of habit of foreboding that we shall never be comfortable, and that he will never settle to work: which I know is wrong, and which I will try with all my might to overcome."

A day or so later Mary Lamb adds, in the same journal-letter: "The Lodging—that pride and pleasure of your heart and mine—is given up, *and here he is again*—Charles, I mean—as un-

settled and as undetermined as ever. When he went to the poor lodging, after the holidays I told you he had taken, he could not endure the solitariness of them, and I had no rest for the sole of my foot till I promised to believe his solemn protestations that he could and would write as well at home as there. Do you believe this?"

Then follows this interesting passage: "I have no power over Charles: he will do—what he will do. But I ought to have some little influence over myself. And therefore I am most manfully resolving to turn over a new leaf with my own mind. Your visit to us, though not a very comfortable one to yourself, has been of great use to me. I set you up in my fancy as a kind of *thing* that takes an interest in my concerns; and I hear you talking to me, and arguing the matter very learnedly, when I give way to despondency. You shall hear a good account of me, and the progress I make in altering my fretful temper to a calm and quiet one. It is but being once thorowly convinced one is wrong, to make one resolve to do so no more; and I know my dismal faces have been almost as great a drawback upon Charles's comfort, as his feverish, teazing ways have been upon mine. Our love for each other has been the torment of our lives hitherto. I am most seriously intending to bend the whole force of my mind to counteract this, and I think I see some prospect of success.

"Of Charles ever bringing any work to pass at home, I am very doubtful; and of the farce succeeding, I have little or no hope."

The truth is that Lamb was reaching a critical age. He was thirty-one, a time of life when the glittering potentialities of youth begin to assume neutral tints and a man learns what he can do and what he cannot do. The pleasant charter which is extended by society to the young, procuring them so many irresponsible hours, is now withdrawn. At thirty-one we are at the beginning of the end; suddenly we awake one morning to find that what we thought was the curtain-raiser is in reality the play itself. It is easy to understand Lamb's restlessness. Like all ambitious artists he was alternating between the certainty that he could create and the doubt whether he had not outgrown the power or had deceived himself in thinking that he ever possessed it. Add to this that his office work was heavy,

his health not robust, and his sister liable at any moment to be taken ill again. It is not surprising that he was in a nervous condition, particularly as he could not then know—as we know now—that he was one of those writers who must not force the note, who must wait until their hour strikes.

The next letter to Hazlitt—March 15th—shows Lamb for the first time in one of his fine ecstasies as a picture lover. "What do you in Shropshire when so many fine pictures are a-going, a-going every day in London? Monday I visit the Marquis of Lansdowne's, in Berkeley Square. Catalogue 2s. 6d. Leonardos in plenty. Some other day this week I go to see Sir Wm. Young's, in Stratford Place. Hulse's, of Blackheath, are also to be sold this month; and in May, the first private collection in Europe, Welbore Ellis Agar's. And there are you, perverting Nature in lying landscapes, filched from old rusty Titians, such as I can scrape up here to send you, with an additament from Shropshire Nature thrown in to make the whole look unnatural. I am afraid of your mouth watering when I tell you that Manning and I got into Angerstein's on Wednesday. *Mon Dieu!* Such Claudes! Four Claudes bought for more than £10,000 (those who talk of Wilson being equal to Claude are either mainly ignorant or stupid); one of these was perfectly miraculous. What colours short of *bonâ fide* sunbeams it could be painted in, I am not earthly colourman enough to say; but I did not think it had been in the possibility of things. Then, a music-piece by Titian—a thousand-pound picture—five figures standing behind a piano, the sixth playing; none of the heads, as M. observed, indicating great men, or affecting it, but so sweetly disposed; all leaning separate ways, but so easy—like a flock of some divine shepherd; the colouring, like the economy of the picture, so sweet and harmonious—as good as Shakspeare's 'Twelfth Night,'—*almost*, that is."[1]

Here and there throughout his letters and essays Lamb breaks out into noble enthusiasm for the painters he most admired; chief of whom were Leonardo and Titian. "The Raising of Lazarus" by Piombo (and perhaps Michael Angelo), which is now No. 1 in the National Gallery and was the gem of John

[1] The Claudes are now in the National Gallery; so also is the music piece, no longer attributed to Titian, but to his school. It is reproduced in my edition of Lamb's Letters.

Julius Angerstein's collection in Pall Mall, was a work which moved him intensely. Lamb and his sister managed to see most of the good pictures of their day, either in sale rooms or exhibitions. De Quincey tells a good story of his sailor-brother, "Pink"—Richard De Quincey—(fresh from admiring Benjamin West's "Death and his Pale Horse") meeting with Charles and Mary Lamb in a Bond Street gallery, whose walls, in Pink's judgment, were debased by the presence of two canvases by Salvator Rosa. "There might be forty people in the room at the time my brother and I were there. We had stood for ten or fifteen minutes, examining the pictures, when at length I noticed Charles Lamb, and, at a little distance, his sister. If a creditor had wished to seize upon either, no surer place in London (no, not Drury Lane, or Covent Garden) for finding them than an exhibition from the works of the old masters. And, moreover, as, amongst certain classes of birds, if you have one, you are sure of the other, so, with respect to the Lambs (unless in those dreary seasons when the '*dual* unity,' as it is most affectingly termed by Wordsworth, had been for a time sundered into a widowed desolation by the periodic affliction), seeing or hearing the brother, you knew the sister could not be far off. If she *were*, you sighed, knew what that meant, and asked no questions.

"Lamb, upon seeing us, advanced to shake hands; but he paused one moment to await the critical dogma which he perceived to be at that time issuing from Pink's lips. That it was vituperation in a high degree, anybody near us might hear; and some actually turned round in fright from catching these profane words: 'D—— the fellow! I could do better myself.' Wherewith, perhaps unconsciously, but perhaps by way of enforcing his thought, Pink (who had brought home from his long sea life a detestable practice of chewing tobacco) ejaculated a quid of some coarse quality, that lighted upon the frame of the great master's picture, and, for aught I know, may be sticking there yet. Lamb could not have approved such a judgment, nor perhaps the immeasurable presumption that might seem to have accompanied such a judgment from most men, or from an artist; but he knew that Pink was a mere sailor, knowing nothing historically of art, nor much of the pretensions of the mighty artists. Or, had it been otherwise, at all events, he

admired and loved, beyond all other qualities whatsoever, a hearty, cordial sincerity. Honest homely obstinacy, not to be enslaved by a great name—though that, again, may, by possibility, become in process of time itself an affectation—Lamb almost reverenced; and therefore it need not surprise anybody that, in the midst of his loud, unrepressed laughter, he came up to my brother, and offered his hand, with an air of friendliness that flattered Pink, and a little misled him; for, that evening, on dining with Pink, he said to me—'That Lamb's a sensible fellow. You see how evidently he approved of what I remarked about that old humbugging rascal, Salvator Rosa.'

"Lamb, in this point, had a feature of character in common with Sir Walter Scott (at least I suppose it to have been a feature of Sir Walter's mind, upon the information of Professor Wilson): that, if a man had, or, if he supposed him to have, a strongly marked combination or tendency of feelings, of opinions, of likings, or of dislikings—what, in fact, we call a *character*—no matter whether it were built upon prejudices the most extravagant, or ignorance the most profound, provided only it were sincere, and not mere lawless audacity, but were self-consistent, and had *unity* as respected itself—in that extent he was sure to manifest liking and respect for the man. And hence it was that Lamb liked Pink much more for this Gothic and outrageous sentence upon Salvator Rosa than he would have liked him for the very best, profoundest, or most comprehensive critique upon that artist that could have been delivered. Pink, on the other hand, liked Lamb greatly, and used, in all his letters, to request that I would present his best regards to that Charles Lamb, 'who wouldn't be humbugged by the old rascal in Bond Street.'"

It was in the spring of this year that Lamb lost Manning in earnest. He sailed for China in April or May, not to return until 1817. Writing from his cabin on the *Thames* at Portsmouth Manning had said, "I go to China: What's the difference to our London friends? I am persuaded I shall come back and see more of you than I have ever been able—who knows but I may make a fortune and take you and Mary out a-riding in my coach? There's nobody has a prior claim to you, you may depend upon it—of course you know you must leave room for my

little Chinese wife, because poor Pipsey's feet are so small she can't walk, you know. Does a man at my age forget and neglect his best and dearest friends? No: well then, you and Mary are safe. So God bless you both."

Lamb's reply has a wistful note. "Four years you talk of, maybe ten, and you may come back and find such alterations! Some circumstance may grow up to you or to me, that may be a bar to the return of any such intimacy. I daresay all this is Hum, and that all will come back; but indeed we die many deaths before we die, and I am almost sick when I think that such a hold as I had of you is gone. I have friends, but some of 'em are changed. Marriage, or some circumstance rises up to make them not the same. But I felt sure of you."

In the same letter he tells Manning the principal news—the *Tales from Shakespear* project. "Mary says you saw her writings about the other day, and she wishes you should know what they are. She is doing for Godwin's bookseller twenty of Shakspear's plays, to be made into Children's tales. Six are already done by her, to wit, 'The Tempest,' 'Winter's Tale,' 'Midsummer Night,' 'Much Ado,' 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and 'Cymbeline:' 'The Merchant of Venice' is in forwardness. I have done 'Othello' and 'Macbeth,' and mean to do all the tragedies. I think it will be popular among the little people. Besides money. It is to bring in 60 guineas. Mary has done them capitally, I think you'd think."

In Mary Lamb's next letter to Sarah Stoddart—June 2nd—she says: "William Hazlitt, the brother of him you know, is in town. . . . [Charles] likes Hazlitt better than any body, except Manning." She adds, of the *Tales*, "Charles has written Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, and has begun Hamlet; you would like to see us, as we often sit writing on one table (but not on one cushion sitting), like Hermia and Helena in the Midsummer's Night's Dream; or, rather, like an old literary Darby and Joan: I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished, and then he finds out he has made something of it. . . .

"Charles smokes still, and will smoke to the end of the chapter.

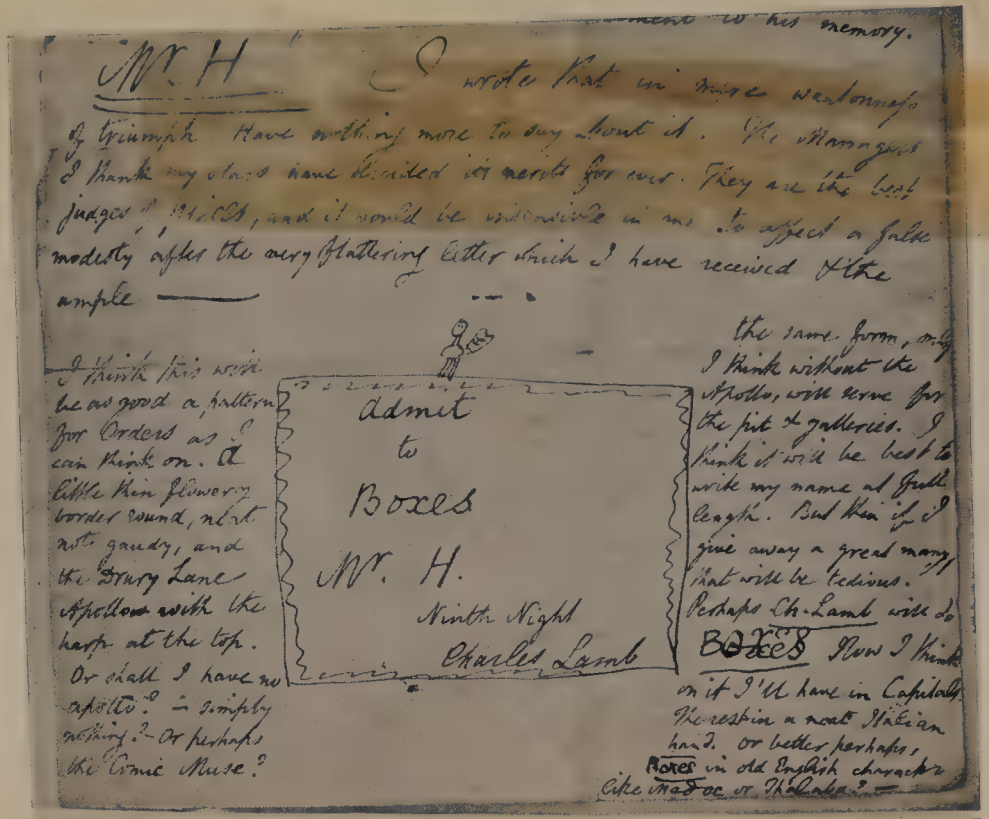
"Martin [Burney] has just been here. My Tales (*again*) and Charles' Farce has made the boy mad to turn Author; and he

has written a Farce, and he has made the Winter's Tale into a story; but what Charles says of himself is really true of Martin, for *he can make nothing at all of it:* and I have been talking very eloquently this morning, to convince him that nobody can write farces, &c. under thirty years of age, and so I suppose he will go home and new model his farce."

Mary Lamb also remarks, concerning marriage, apropos of Miss Stoddart's flirtation with a Mr. White, "I have known many single men I should have liked in my life (*if it had suited them*) for a husband: but very few husbands have I ever wished was mine, which is rather against the state in general; but one never is disposed to envy wives their good husbands. So much for marrying—but, however, get married, if you can."

Writing to Wordsworth on June 26th Lamb has great news—"Mr. H." has been accepted for Drury Lane. He copies the letter of acceptance and encloses a chaste design for a complimentary ticket to the Boxes on the ninth night. "I think this will be as good a pattern for Orders as I can think on. A little thin flowery border round, neat not gaudy, and the Drury Lane Apollo with the harp at the top. Or shall I have no Apollo?—simply nothing? Or perhaps the Comic Muse? The same form, only I think without the Apollo, will serve for the pit and galleries. I think it will be best to write my name at full-length; but then if I give away a great many, that will be tedious. Perhaps *Ch. Lamb* will do." The other news is that the Lambs have supped with the Clarksons and that Mrs. Godwin has been visiting Mrs. Charlotte Smith, the sonneteer.

The remark in the same letter that Montagu has lost his wife, brings another of Lamb's secondary friends before us—Basil Montagu, the lawyer, then thirty-six years of age, and the friend of Godwin, Wordsworth and Coleridge. The reference is to Montagu's second wife, whom he had married in 1801. He afterwards married the widow of Thomas Skepper, of York—the Mrs. Montagu of whose conversation Hazlitt wrote so glowingly, the friend of Carlyle and Edward Irving. In Fanny Kemble's recollections is a pleasant description of Montagu and his third wife (the mother of the famous Mrs. Procter, and grandmother of Adelaide Ann Procter), which I may quote in default of anything more vivid. "Basil Montagu was the son of the Earl of Sandwich and the beautiful Miss Wray, whose German




REDUCED FACSIMILE OF LETTER FROM LAMB TO WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

FROM THE ORIGINAL IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. GORDON WORDSWORTH

lover murdered her at the theatre by shooting her in her private box, and then blew his own brains out. Mr. Montagu inherited ability, eccentricity, and personal beauty, from his parents. . . . I have a general impression that his personal intercourse gave a far better idea of his intellectual ability than anything that he achieved either in his profession or in letters. . . . His conversation was extremely vivid and sparkling, and the quaint eccentricity of his manner added to the impression of originality which he produced upon one. Very unlike the common run of people as he was, however, he was far less so than his wife, who certainly was one of the most striking and remarkable persons I have known. Her appearance was extraordinary: she was much above middle height, with a beautiful figure and face, the outline of which was of classical purity and severity, while her whole carriage and appearance was dignified and majestic to the highest degree. I knew her for upwards of thirty years, and never saw her depart from a peculiar style of dress, which she had adopted with the finest instinct of what was personally becoming as well as graceful and beautiful in itself."

Lamb's letter to Wordsworth which has led to this diversion contains also this passage: "Mary is just stuck fast in All's Well that Ends Well. She complains of having to set forth so many female characters in boy's clothes. She begins to think Shakspear must have wanted Imagination. I to encourage her, for she often faints in the prosecution of her great work, flatter her with telling her how well such a play and such a play is done. But she is stuck fast and I have been obliged to promise to assist her. To do this it will be necessary to leave off Tobacco. But I had some thoughts of doing that before, for I sometimes think it does not agree with me.

"W. Hazlitt is in Town. I took him to see a very pretty girl professedly, where there were two young girls—the very head and sum of the Girlery was two young girls—they neither laughed nor sneered nor giggled nor whispered—but they were young girls—and he sat and frowned blacker and blacker, indignant that there should be such a thing as Youth and Beauty, till he tore me away before supper in perfect misery and owned he could not bear young girls. They drove him mad. So I took him home to my old Nurse [Mary Lamb], where he recover'd perfect tranquillity." The toils were, however, as we shall see,

closing about the misogynist. Every day his meeting with Sarah Stoddart drew nearer.

On July 4th Mary Lamb gives Sarah Stoddart further news of Hazlitt and Charles. "Charles and Hazlitt are going to Sadler's Wells, and I am amusing myself in their absence with reading a manuscript of Hazlitt's; but have laid it down to write a few lines, to tell you how we are going on. Charles has begged a month's hollidays, of which this is the first day, and they are all to be spent at home. We thank you for your kind invitations, and were half-inclined to come down to you; but after mature deliberation, and many wise consultations, such as you know we often hold, we came to the resolution of staying quietly at home: and during the hollidays we are both of us to set stoutly to work and finish the Tales, six of them being yet to do. We thought, if we went anywhere and left them undone, they would lay upon our minds; and that when we returned, we should feel unsettled, and our money all spent besides: and next summer we are to be very rich, and then we can afford a long journey some where.

"I shall soon have done my work, and know not what to begin next. Now, will you set your brains to work and invent a story, either for a short child's story, or a long one that would make a kind of Novel, or a Story that would make a play. Charles wants me to write a play, but I am not over anxious to set about it, but seriously will you draw me out a skeleton of a story, either from memory of any thing that you have read, or from your own invention, and I will fill it up in some way or other."

A day or so later Mary Lamb adds: "They (Hazlitt and Charles) came home from Sadler's Well so dismal and dreary dull on Friday, that I gave them both a good scolding—*quite a setting to rights;* and I think it has done some good, for Charles has been very chearful ever since. I begin to hope the *home hollidays* will go on very well."

We must now turn for a while to Coleridge, of whom there have been indistinct tidings from time to time, for he returned to England in August of this year, a broken man. He had, as we have seen, reached Malta in May, 1804, and for a while had lived in Stoddart's house. But Stoddart was a man of inflexible will and a very stern sense of moral responsibility, and Coleridge seems quickly to have found that to be comfortable he must leave. He therefore passed in June or early July to the resi-

dence of the Governor, Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander John Ball, who had been one of Nelson's captains, and there he talked well and did a little secretarial work. In August he tired of Malta and left for Sicily, nourishing a somewhat vague notion, shared by Ball, of "drawing up a political paper on the revenue and resources" of the island. In November he departed from Syracuse and returned to Malta, where he lived in a garret in the Treasury and resumed his duties with the Governor: in January, 1805, actually succeeding to the post of Public Secretary, at a salary of £1,200—an interim appointment, which lasted, however, for some eight months, although Coleridge states that the pay was not satisfactorily arranged.

The permanent Public Secretary arriving in September, Coleridge, who had been distastefully busy in his official capacity, on the 22nd said good-bye to an island which he had grown to detest, and sailed for Italy. He seems to have divided his time between Naples and Rome until May 18th, 1806, sending only very irregular and fragmentary accounts of himself to England. The French invested Naples while he was in Italy, and his reason for leaving the country in a panic, as he did, is said to have been the order for his arrest on account of certain of his old *Morning Post* articles against Napoleon. Be this as it may, he sailed from Leghorn, probably in June, and, after a bad passage in which he was very ill, reached Portsmouth on August 11th, 1806. He proceeded to London on the 17th, and on the 18th took up his abode with the Lambs in Mitre Court Buildings, weak in health and hopeless for the future.

As Mr. Dykes Campbell says, in his memoir of Coleridge, "Almost his first words to Stuart were: 'I am literally afraid, even to cowardice, to ask for any person, or of any person.' Spite of the friendliest and most unquestioning welcome from all most dear to him, it was the saddest of home-comings, for the very sympathy held out with both hands induced only a bitter, hopeless feeling of remorse—a

> Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain;—
> And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;—

of broken promises,—promises to friends and promises to himself; and above all, sense of a will paralysed, dead perhaps, killed by his own hand." Coleridge remained at Lamb's at any

rate until August 29th, afterwards taking rooms in the *Courier* office at 348 Strand. Meanwhile his reluctance to meet or communicate with his wife was causing his friends much concern, and none more than Mary Lamb, who wrote to Dorothy Wordsworth at least two letters on the subject, filled with anxious sympathy, asking for the mediation of Wordsworth or Southey. The earlier letter of the two is missing.

On December 5th Lamb tells Manning of the failure of Holcroft's play "The Vindictive Man," and Holcroft adds a friendly postcript, all unconscious of the subject of Lamb's letter. Lamb also describes the plot of "Mr. H.," from which he expects £300 altogether. "However, don't let it go any further. I understand there are dramatic exhibitions in China. One would not like to be forestalled." Mary and he, Lamb says, are to sit "next the orchestra in the pit, next the tweedledees."

And so we come to the great night itself, December 10th, 1806, when "Mr. H." was produced. As the accompanying playbill tells us, Elliston was in the title-part and everything promised well. Lamb, his sister, Hazlitt and Crabb Robinson were together in the pit; a strong body of friendly clerks came from the East India House, and, with John Lamb at their head, from the South-Sea House. All promised well and the prologue went splendidly; but the farce would not do. It was condemned heartily, its author, Robinson tells us, joining in the hisses as cordially as any—brave critic that he was. We laugh at the story now, and Lamb used to laugh as he told it, but it is not the least pathetic incident in the history of literature, this utter breakdown of a year's plans, and Lamb's instant recognition of the soundness of the verdict.

His letter to Wordsworth illustrates his fine temper:—

"Mary's Love to all of you—I wouldn't let her write—

"Dear Wordsworth, Mr. H. came out last night and failed. I had many fears; the subject was not substantial enough. John Bull must have solider fare than a *Letter*. We are pretty stout about it, have had plenty of condoling friends, but after all, we had rather it should have succeeded. You will see the Prologue in most of the Morning Papers. It was received with such shouts as I never witness'd to a Prologue. It was attempted to be encored. How hard! a thing I did merely as a

INTERIOR OF THEATRE ROYAL, DRUARY LANE AS IT WAS WHEN "MR. H." WAS PRODUCED

FROM *THE MICROCOSM OF LONDON*

task, because it was wanted—and set no great store by; and Mr. H.——!!

"The quantity of friends we had in the house, my brother and I being in Public Offices &c., was astonishing—but they yielded at length to a few hisses. A hundred hisses—damn the word, I write it like kisses—how different—a hundred hisses outweigh a 1000 Claps. The former come more directly from the Heart—Well, 'tis withdrawn and there is an end.

"Better Luck to us—— C. L.

"11 Dec.—(turn over).

"P.S. Pray when any of you write to the Clarksons, give our kind Loves, and say we shall not be able to come and see them at Xmas—as I shall have but a day or two,—and tell them we bear our mortification pretty well."

Hazlitt has given us in his essay "On Great and Little Things" the story of the evening. "We often make life unhappy in wishing things to have turned out otherwise than they did, merely because that is possible to the imagination which is impossible in fact. I remember when L[amb]'s farce was damned (for damned it was, that's certain) I used to dream every night for a month after (and then I vowed I would plague myself no more about it) that it was revived at one of the Minor or provincial theatres with great success, that such and such retrenchments and alterations had been made in it, and that it was thought *it might do at the other House.* I had heard indeed (this was told in confidence to L.) that *Gentleman* Lewis was present on the night of its performance, and said, that if he had had it, he would have made it, by a few judicious curtailments, 'the most popular little thing that had been brought out for some time.' How often did I conjure up in recollection the full diapason of applause at the end of the *Prologue*, and hear my ingenious friend in the first row of the pit roar with laughter at his own wit! Then I dwelt with forced complacency on some part in which it had been doing well: then we would consider (in concert) whether the long, tedious opera of the *Travellers*, which preceded it, had not tried people beforehand, so that they had not spirits left for the quaint and sparkling 'wit skirmishes' of the dialogue, and we all agreed it might have gone down after a Tragedy, except L. himself, who swore he had no

hopes of it from the beginning, and that he knew the name of the hero when it came to be discovered could not be got over."

As a matter of fact "Mr. H." was an unusually clever play of its kind, and it still reads well; but there were reasons enough for its failure. To a public fed on the broad dramatic fun of Colman and O'Keeffe there was nothing satisfying in a farce the chief humour of which turned upon a grotesque surname. The audience looked for comic situations and droll horseplay, and were offered only a literary jest. Moreover to many of them it cannot have been considered worthy even of the name of jest. No visitor to the theatre, for example, who took an interest in cricket at that day can have been in the least degree amused by the name of Hogsflesh, since the famous Hogsflesh of Hambledon, the bowler, was a household name among all who followed the game. Again, no one in the audience who had stayed at Worthing, the new fashionable watering-place, can have been amused, since Hogsflesh was the name of one of the two innkeepers there, the other being, by an odd chance, Bacon. A rhyme on these names, current at the time, seems to have anticipated Lamb's secret only too thoroughly:—

Brighton is a pretty street,
Worthing is much taken:
If you can't get any other meat,
There's Hogsflesh and Bacon.

The management of Drury Lane advertised "Mr. H." as a success, and intended to repeat the performance, but Lamb begged them not. Yet across the Atlantic it was frequently well received—another instance of America's fidelity to Charles Lamb.

Writing to Mrs. Clarkson, Mary Lamb said that Charles intended to write another farce "with all his dearly bought experience in his head," but he did not do so for many years, and when he did, it was that very poor thing "The Pawnbroker's Daughter."

"Mr. H." brought Lamb at any rate one new acquaintance in whom, although they were never very intimate, he always delighted—Robert William Elliston, the actor. According to the essay "Ellistoniana" Lamb first met Elliston in his circulating library at Leamington, but that cannot have been the case. I feel certain that he first met Elliston in connection with "Mr. H."

In his superb character sketch of the actor, Lamb tells this story, which belonged, I have little doubt, to 1806 or an adjacent year. "One proud day to me he took his roast mutton with us in the Temple, to which I had superadded a preliminary haddock. After a rather plentiful partaking of the meagre banquet, not unrefreshed with the humbler sort of liquors, I made a sort of apology for the humility of the fare, observing that for my own part I never ate but one dish at dinner. 'I too never eat but one thing at dinner'—was his reply—then after a pause—'reckoning fish as nothing.' The manner was all. It was as if by one peremptory sentence he had decreed the annihilation of all the savory esculents, which the pleasant and nutritious-food-giving Ocean pours forth upon poor humans from her watery bosom. This was *greatness*, tempered with considerate *tenderness* to the feelings of his scanty but welcoming entertainer."

So—with the sense of failure, we may feel sadly sure, too present with Lamb—died the year 1806. Before leaving it, however, I should like to add that our first information of his famous Wednesday evenings (afterwards changed to Thursdays) was in a letter to Manning on December 5th. "Rickman and Captain Burney are well; they assemble at my house pretty regularly of a Wednesday—a new institution. Like other great men I have a public day, cribbage and pipes, with Phillips and noisy Martin [Burney]." For some years these Wednesday parties were held once a week, any one of Lamb's circle being at liberty to drop in for cards, conversation and cold supper. Several descriptions of the evenings have been written, but all belong rather to a later period. I defer them therefore for ten years or so, until Talfourd and Procter have joined the circle.

One other event of great importance in Lamb's life—or at least in our knowledge of Lamb's life—occurred in 1806: the first meeting with Henry Crabb Robinson. "I was introduced to the Lambs," he writes, "by Mrs. Clarkson, and I heard of them also from W. Hazlitt. . . . They were then living in a garret in Inner Temple Lane." (Robinson, who wrote this in extreme old age, was wrong; the Lambs were living in a set of upper rooms in Mitre Court Buildings.) "In that humble apartment I spent many happy hours, and saw a greater number of excellent persons than I had ever seen collected together in one room."

It is rather odd that Robinson, who had been well known to George Dyer and Hazlitt since 1799, had not before met the Lambs. In 1806 he was thirty-one, almost exactly a month younger than Lamb. Not yet having made up his mind to go to the Bar, he had settled, after serving his time with a solicitor, in Germany, met Goethe and Schiller, studied at Jena, and translated German works into English. In 1807 he joined the *Times* staff as special correspondent at Altona; later he was sent to Corunna, and subsequently took up his post as foreign editor of the paper. In 1809 he abandoned journalism, devoted himself to law, and in 1813 was called to the Bar and joined the Norfolk Circuit. We shall see much of him later.

Robinson brought several friends into the Lamb circle, among them John Dyer Collier and Mrs. Collier, and their son, John Payne Collier, afterwards notorious as a Shakespearian emendator. Young Collier, who was in those days a journalist, had already begun to take a profound interest in Early English and Elizabethan literature. In his *Old Man's Diary*, which was privately printed in 1871, are many glimpses of Lamb. One passage, written in 1833, may be quoted here, since it applies more or less to the period that we have reached. "Although it is now almost twenty years since, I distinctly recollect the first time I saw Coleridge and Lamb together: they came to my father's; he then living in Hatton Garden, but was not at home: H. C. R. was there to receive them; and the conversation turning upon the fineness of the day, my mother said that the sun had almost put out her eyes. 'Yes,' said Coleridge, quoting a line from 'Love's Labour's Lost,'

> 'Light seeking light doth light of light beguile.'

I did not then know from whence the line came, but I knew it was verse, not only from the measure, but from the peculiar, rather sing-song way in which Coleridge pronounced the passage. Lamb made another quotation from the very same play on the same day; for my mother was employed upon painting a rose, and Lamb, observing it, said,

> 'At Christmas I no more desire a rose,
> Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled shows.'

But how he applied it I do not remember, because it was now midsummer, not winter. They both made themselves very agreeable, and even my young mind was struck by the pleasant way in which they treated the familiar topics of conversation; while Coleridge, as I thought, especially endeavoured to adapt his remarks to the younger children."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### 1807 AND 1808

*Tales from Shakespear* Published—A Visit to the Clarksons—Hazlitt's Misogyny Overcome—The Hazlitt Suicide Joke—Plans for Hazlitt's Wedding—Braham's Singing—Mary Matilda Betham—Lamb's "Company Ways"—Coleridge's Lectures—Hazlitt's Wedding—*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare*—*Mrs. Leicester's School*—Collaboration with the Sheridans—Promise of the *Friend.*

THE *Tales from Shakespear* "by Charles Lamb" were published in January, 1807, with twenty plates by Mulready, chosen, much to Lamb's annoyance, by Mrs. Godwin. In sending the two little volumes to Wordsworth on January 29th, he says that he is responsible for "Lear, Macbeth, Timon, Romeo, Hamlet, Othello, and for occasionally a tail piece or correction of grammar, for none of the cuts and all of the spelling;" also for half of the preface, the first part of which was written by Mary Lamb. It seems to have been Godwin's fault that Lamb's name stood alone on the title-page. I imagine that both the authors wished for anonymity, and that Mary Lamb insisted upon it, having probably a very natural disinclination to appear in public. I do not find her publicly associated with the book until the issue of a directory of authors a dozen years later.

The preface to the *Tales from Shakespear* ends thus: "What these Tales have been to you in childhood, that and much more it is my wish that the true Plays of Shakespear may prove to you in older years—enrichers of the fancy, strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honourable thoughts and actions, to teach you courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity; for of examples, teaching these virtues, his pages are full." To a large extent Lamb's wish must have been fulfilled, since the book still holds its own as a nursery classic, and will, I think, continue to do so for many years. Closer paraphrases of the plays

have been published, but the delicate reasonableness and charm of the Lambs' version has never been approached. Both brother and sister had a congenial task in emphasising the gentleness of Shakespeare's heroines and the nobility of his heroes—no one could have done it so sweetly as they, or so much in the spirit of the great original. The narratives are very dexterous. The pleasanter and more ordinarily human plays were safe with Mary Lamb, whose avoidance of adult complexities amounts to genius. Of the tragedies, which fell to Lamb, who retold them in easy prose of a slightly austere cast, "Timon" is perhaps the most dignified and remarkable.

Our information of what otherwise happened in 1807 is meagre, but I imagine that Lamb set to work upon his prose story of the *Adventures of Ulysses*, which he prepared from George Chapman's translation of the *Odyssey*, shortly or immediately after the completion of the *Tales from Shakespear*, and that Mary Lamb was thinking both of *Mrs. Leicester's School* and of *Poetry for Children*, which were, however, as we shall see, not published until 1808 and 1809.

The year 1807 is one of the barrenest in the matter of letters. But fortunately a note to the Clarksons has recently been published which tells us that the Lambs visited the philanthropist and his wife at Bury St. Edmunds in June; that Mary Lamb, after a very happy time, was taken ill and had quickly to be removed to Hoxton; and that Lamb spent the rest of his holiday in working at his *Dramatic Specimens* in the Museum —a piece of information which helps to emphasise the literary activity of this year.

The next letter of 1807 is from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart, written, I imagine, about October. Since the preceding letter of their correspondence William Hazlitt had met Miss Stoddart, had proposed, and was about to be accepted. The letter, which is full of amused interest in this development, ends, "If I were sure you would not be quite starved to death, nor beaten to a mummy, I should like to see Hazlitt and you come together, if (as Charles observes) it were only for the joke sake." The other news is that Lamb is writing the prologue for Godwin's new tragedy "Faulkener," which was produced with moderate success on December 16th, 1807.

On December 21st Mary Lamb writes again, urging upon

Sarah Stoddart the importance of getting the approval of her brother, who was in England again for a while, upon her marriage. Stoddart, when told, was not enthusiastic; and indeed from that time forward he and Hazlitt mutually fostered a disagreement which under political stress ripened into acute hostility in later years.

In the same month—December—began the great Hazlitt suicide joke, which Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, the essayist's grandson, lately put on record in his volume *Lamb and Hazlitt*. As a humorous means—or so I imagine—of bringing home to his friends the defeat and surrender of the determined bachelor, Lamb wrote a letter on December 29th to Joseph Hume, an acquaintance at Somerset House, announcing that Hazlitt had cut his throat (i.e., had become engaged). "I suppose you know what has happen'd to our poor friend Hazlitt. If not, take it as I read it in the Morning Post or Fashionable World of this morning: 'Last night Mr. H., a portrait painter in Southampton Buildings, Holborn, put an end to his existence by cutting his throat in a shocking manner. It is supposed that he must have committed his purpose with a pallet-knife, as the edges of the cicatrice or wound were found besmeared with a yellow consistence, but the knife could not be found. The reasons of this rash act are not assigned; an unfortunate passion has been mentioned; but nothing certain is known. The deceased was subject to hypochondria, low spirits, but he had lately seemed better, having paid more than usual attention to his dress and person. Besides being a painter, he had written some pretty things in prose & verse.'"

Hazlitt played up gallantly enough. On January 10th, 1808, he issued a manifesto of his vitality, and an appeal that his funeral might not take place as was intended. At the end he enumerated his most valuable belongings, concluding thus: "7, & lastly, a small Claude Lorraine mirror, which Mr. Lamb the other evening secretly purloined after a pretended visit of condolence to his sick friend; & which will doubtless be found shamelessly hung up in the chambers of the fraudulent possessor as a final trophy & insult over the memory of the deceased. It is probable that when charged with this irregular transfer of property he will say that it was won at a game at cribbage. But this is an entirely false pretence.

"With all the sincerity of a man doubtful between life & death, the petitioner declares that he looks upon the said Charles Lamb as the ring-leader in this unjust conspiracy against him, & as the sole cause & author of the jeopardy he is in: but that as losers have leave to speak, he must say, that, if it were not for a poem he wrote on Tobacco about two years ago, a farce called Mr. H—— he brought out last winter with more wit than discretion in it, some prologues & epilogues he has since written with good success, & some lively notes he is at present writing on dead authors [the *Dramatic Specimens*], he sees no reason why he should not be considered as much a dead man as himself, & the undertaker spoken to accordingly."

Lamb and Hume kept the ball in the air for a few days longer. The joke then died.

Leigh Hunt, in an essay on Æronautics in the *New Monthly Magazine* for September, 1835, has an odd story of Lamb in high spirits in Hazlitt's company, which may be told here: "The late admirable writer and most kind human being, Charles Lamb, one of the most considerate of kinsmen, and highly imaginative also in his way, could run (as he once actually did) along the top of a high parapet wall in the Temple,—so much to the terror of Hazlitt, that the latter cried out, in a sort of rage and cruel transport of sympathy, 'Lamb, if you don't come down, I shall push you over.'"

On February 12th, 1808, Mary Lamb's practical mind is busy with Sarah Stoddart's wedding. "I find Hazlitt has mentioned to you an intention which we had of asking you up to town, which we were bent on doing, but, having named it since to your brother, the Doctor expressed a strong desire that you should not come to town to be at any other house than his own, for he said that it would have a very strange appearance. His wife's father is coming to be with them till near the end of April, after which time he shall have full room for you. And if you are to be married, he wishes that you should be married with all the proper decorums, *from his house*. Now though we should be most willing to run any hazards of disobliging him, if there were no other means of your and Hazlitt's meeting, yet as he seems so friendly to the match, it would not be worth while to alienate him from you and ourselves too, for the slight accommodation which the difference of a few weeks would make, provided

always, and be it understood, that if you and H. make up your minds to be married before the time in which you can be at your brother's, our house stands open and most ready at a moment's notice to receive you. Only we would not quarrel unnecessarily with your brother. Let there be a clear necessity shewn, and we will quarrel with any body's brother."

Writing to Manning on February 26th Lamb tells all the news. "A treaty of marriage is on foot between William Hazlitt and Miss Stoddart. Something about settlements only retards it. She has somewhere about £80 a year, to be £120 when her mother dies. He has no settlement except what he can claim from the Parish. *Pauper est Cinna, sed amat.* The thing is therefore in abeyance. But there is love o' both sides. . . .

"I have done two books since the failure of my farce; they will both be out this Summer. The one is a juvenile book—'The Adventures of Ulysses,' intended to be an introduction to the reading of Telemachus! It is done out of the Odyssey, not from the Greek: I would not mislead you; nor yet from Pope's Odyssey, but from an older translation of one Chapman. The 'Shakspear Tales' suggested the doing it. Godwin is in both those cases my bookseller. The other is done for Longman, and is 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets contemporary with Shakspear.' Specimens are becoming fashionable. We have—'Specimens of Ancient English Poets,' 'Specimens of Modern English Poets,' 'Specimens of Ancient English Prose Writers,' without end. They used to be called 'Beauties.' You have seen 'Beauties of Shakespear?' so have many people that never saw any beauties in Shakespear. Longman is to print it, and be at all the expense and risk; and I am to share the profits after all deductions; i.e. a year or two hence I must pocket what they please to tell me is due to me. But the book is such as I am glad there should be. It is done out of old plays at the Museum and out of Dodsley's collection, &c. It is to have notes.

"Do you like Braham's singing?" the letter continues. "The little Jew has bewitched me. I follow him like as the boys follow Tom the Piper. He cured me of melancholy, as David cured Saul; but I don't throw stones at him, as Saul did at David in payment. I was insensible to music till he gave me a new sense. O, that you could go to the new opera of 'Kais'

to-night! 'Tis all about Eastern manners; it would just suit you. It describes the wild Arabs, wandering Egyptians, lying dervishes, and all that sort of people, to a hair. You needn't ha' gone so far to see what you see, if you saw it as I do every night at Drury-lane Theatre. Braham's singing, when it is impassioned, is finer than Mrs. Siddons's or Mr. Kemble's acting; and when it is not impassioned, it is as good as hearing a person of fine sense talking. The brave little Jew! . . .

"Wordsworth, the great poet, is coming to town; he is to have apartments in the Mansion House. He says he does not see much difficulty in writing like Shakspeare, if he had a mind to try it. It is clear then nothing is wanting but the mind. Even Coleridge a little checked at this hardihood of assertion."[1]

Later in the letter Lamb says, "Dyer came to me the other evening at 11 o'clock, when there was a large room full of company, which I usually get together on a Wednesday evening (all great men have public days), to propose to me to have my face done by a Miss Beetham (or Betham), a miniature painter, . . . to put before my book of Extracts. I declined it."

Miss Betham was Mary Matilda Betham, who came to know the Lambs with some intimacy. Among her portraits are miniatures of Mrs. Coleridge and Sara Coleridge; and to her George Dyer addressed a complimentary copy of verses. Among the recollections of Lamb which Miss Betham sent to Talfourd, and which he used only in the first edition of the *Final Memorials*, are some trifling yet not unamusing anecdotes of Lamb's "company" ways. Thus: "When I knew him first, I happened to sit next him at dinner, and he was running on about some lady who had died of love for him, saying 'he was very sorry,' but we could not command such inclinations, making all the common-place stuff said on such occasions appear very ridiculous; his sister laughingly interrupting him now and then, by saying, 'Why she's alive now!' 'Why she's married, and has a large family,' &c."

Again, "A Miss Pate (when he heard of her, he asked if she

[1] This agreeable passage was omitted by Talfourd in his transcript of the letter, Wordsworth being then living. Crabb Robinson quotes the remark in his *Diary*, but his editor, Dr. Sadler, was also unnecessarily kind, and for the poet's name substituted a dash.

was any relation to Mr. John *Head*, of Ipswich) was at a party, and he said on hearing her name, 'Miss Pate I hate.' 'You are the first person who ever told me so, however,' said she. 'Oh! I mean nothing by it. If it had been Miss Dove, I should have said Miss Dove I love, or Miss Pike I like.' . . . Another who was very much marked with the small-pox, he said, looked as if the devil had ridden rough-shod over her face. I saw him talking to her afterwards with great apparent interest, and noticed it, saying, 'I thought he had not liked her.' His reply was, 'I like her internals very well.'"

It is now time again to take up the threads of Coleridge's life. We saw him last in London after returning from Italy, in 1806. During 1807 he was largely in the west of England, sometimes with Poole, sometimes with his wife, from whom he had not yet separated, planning a series of lectures to be given at the Royal Institution and postponing the execution of this and other tasks. In November he had received De Quincey's gift of £300, and at the end of 1807 he was at the *Courier* office again, really at work upon the lectures, the subject of which was poetry. These were given fitfully between February and June, 1808, the series being much interrupted by Coleridge's bad health, which in March was so unsatisfactory as to cause Wordsworth to come to town largely in order to see him. Southey also made the journey. During their visit Coleridge became stronger, and, the lectures off his mind at last, visited the Clarksons at Bury St. Edmunds. Later he moved to Grasmere, where he made his home, recovered his spirits to some extent, planned the *Friend*, and finally separated from his wife, although remaining on fairly good terms with her.

Writing to Mrs. Clarkson at the end of the year, 1808, Mary Lamb says—not I think without real grief, for her feeling for Coleridge, I always fancy, was a very tender and half-maternal one:—"Coleridge in a manner gave us up when he was in town, and we have now lost all traces of him. At the time he was in town I received two letters from Miss Wordsworth which I never answered because I would not complain to her of our old friend. As this has never been explained to her it must seem very strange, more particularly so, as Miss Hutchinson & Mrs. Wordsworth were in an ill state of health at the time. Will you some day soon write a few words just to tell me how they all are and all

you know concerning them? Do not imagine that I am now *complaining* to you of Coleridge. Perhaps we are both in fault, we expect *too much*, and he gives *too little*. We ought many years ago to have understood each other better. Nor is it quite all over with us yet, for he will some day or other come in with the same old face, and receive (after a few spiteful words from me) the same warm welcome as ever. But we could not submit to sit as hearers at his lectures and not be permitted to see our old friend when *school-hours* were over."

To return, on March 15th Lamb had Crabb Robinson to breakfast, to meet Wordsworth. It was Robinson's introduction to a poet whom he admired profoundly and whom he afterwards knew intimately. At the same time Mary Lamb is writing to Miss Stoddart about the wedding, which draws very near—would her friend like her as bridesmaid to wear the "dead-whitish-bloom" coloured silk which Manning has sent from China, or the sprigged gown, and so forth. "I shall have no present to give you on your marriage, nor do I expect that I shall be rich enough to give anything to baby at the first christening, but at the second, or third child's I hope to have a coral or so to spare out of my own earnings. Do not ask me to be God-mother, for I have an objection to that—but there is I believe, no serious duties attached to a bride's maid, therefore I come with a willing mind, bringing nothing with me but many wishes, and not a few hopes, and a very little of fears of happy years to come."

On Sunday morning, May 1st, 1808, at St. Andrew's Church, Holborn, William Hazlitt and Sarah Stoddart were made man and wife. Mary Lamb was the only bridesmaid, and Charles Lamb, John Stoddart and Mrs. Stoddart the only other guests of whom we have any record. Lamb told Southey some years later that he was like to have been turned out several times during the ceremony—"anything awful makes me laugh."

Some time in the summer Longmans published the *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived about the Time of Shakespeare*, on which Lamb had been working desultorily for some years and which he may be said to have been unconsciously preparing to write all his life. A letter from Southey to Mrs. Southey in May, 1804, suggests that Southey may have been the begetter of the book: "I saw Longman yesterday. . . . I am

trying to make him publish a collection of the scarce old English poets, which will be the fittest thing in the world for Lamb to manage, if he likes it; or perhaps to manage with my co-operation." Lamb, when approached, may have considered the scheme and have modified it into the *Specimens*.

The work laid the foundation of his reputation as a critic. Until its appearance he had been known, if at all, only as an experimentalist in verse, prose, and the drama. But to the discerning eye there was nothing tentative about the notes and selections in this new volume; they were the work of an imaginative critic of a very high order, who knew his own mind. We can believe that even Lamb's friends must have been not a little surprised by the courage and vigour of some of his judgments. Thus, of Marlowe:—

> Barabas the Jew, and Faustus the Conjurer, are offsprings of a mind which at least delighted to dally with interdicted subjects. They both talk a language which a believer would have been tender of putting into the mouth of a character though but in fiction. But the holiest minds have sometimes not thought it blameable to counterfeit impiety in the person of another, to bring Vice in upon the stage speaking her own dialect, and, themselves being armed with an Unction of self-confident impunity, have not scrupled to handle and touch that familiarly, which would be death to others. Milton in the person of Satan has started speculations hardier than any which the feeble armoury of the atheist ever furnished; and the precise strait-laced Richardson has strengthened Vice, from the mouth of Lovelace, with entangling sophistries and abstruse pleas against her adversary Virtue which Sedley, Villiers, and Rochester, wanted depth of libertinism sufficient to have invented.

And of Dekker's play "The Honest Whore":—

> This simple picture of Honour and Shame, contrasted without violence, and expressed without immodesty, is worth all the *strong lines* against the Harlot's Profession, with which both Parts of this play are offensively crowded. A Satyrist is always to be suspected, who, to make vice odious, dwells upon all its acts and minutest circumstances with a sort of relish and retrospective gust. But so near are the boundaries of panegyric and invective, that a worn-out Sinner is sometimes found to make the best Declaimer against Sin. The same high-seasoned descriptions which in his unregenerate state served to inflame his appetites, in his new province of a Moralist will serve him (a little turned) to expose the enormity of those appetites in other men. When Cervantes with such proficiency of fondness dwells upon the Don's library, who sees not that he has been a great reader of books of Knight-Errantry? perhaps was at some time of his life in danger of falling into those very extravagances which he ridicules so happily in his Hero?
>
> No one will doubt, who reads Marston's Satires, that the Author in some part of his life must have been something more than a theorist in vice. Have

we never heard an old preacher in the pulpit display such an insight into the mystery of ungodliness, as made us wonder with reason how a good man came by it?

The purpose of the *Specimens* Lamb thus explained: "My leading design has been, to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors. To show in what manner they felt, when they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying situations, in the conflicts of duty and passion, or the strife of contending duties; what sort of loves and enmities theirs were; how their griefs were tempered, and their full-swoln joys abated: how much of Shakspeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind." In the present day there is no lack of discriminating appreciation of Shakespeare's contemporaries; but it must be remembered that although by a few scholars the old dramatists were well known Lamb was the first to bring the glint of the treasure to the eyes of the ordinary reader. He was quickly followed by others; but it was his book that showed the way. Lamb was always proud of the feat; in 1827, in the half-humorous biography of himself which he wrote for a friend, he remarked that he was "the first to draw the public attention to the old English dramatists in a work called 'Specimens of English Dramatic Writers who lived about the time of Shakespeare.'"

The year 1808 saw the publication also of Lamb's *Adventures of Ulysses*, and, at the end, of *Mrs. Leicester's School* (dated 1809). Both books were issued by Mrs. Godwin, who now put her own name to her publications, and had moved the business from Hanway Street to 41 Skinner Street, Holborn.

*Mrs. Leicester's School* was Mary Lamb's book even more than the *Tales from Shakespear*, for of its ten stories all but three were hers, and they were written probably without any hint or help from her brother. The story of "The Young Mahomedan," from which I have already quoted, in Chapter III., "The Sailor Uncle" and "The Visit to the Cousins," contain, I think, the best of Mary Lamb's sweet and simple prose. Charles Lamb's story of "The Witch Aunt" (from which I have quoted, in Chapter II.) could not, I think, be improved in any direction; while "The Sea Voyage" and "First Visit to Church," his other contributions, have a wistful fragrance that only he could impart.

The book has never had the favour it deserved, and probably now never will, since children are receding every year farther from such simplicity as distinguishes it. Its old-fashioned and rather formal machinery has perhaps been against it; but those who love the stories (which must be loved ere they will seem worthy of love) love them exceedingly. Landor was moved to eloquent rapture by "The Father's Wedding Day."

The *Adventures of Ulysses*, which was wholly by Lamb, has had much less popularity; but it is an admirably told tale occupying a very high place in the literature for children.

Mary Lamb's letter to Sarah Hazlitt of December 10th, 1808—the last of the year—gives a hint of a dramatic work of Lamb's of which all trace has vanished. "The Sheffington is quite out now, my brother having got drunk with claret and Tom Sheridan. This visit, and the occasion of it, is a profound secret, and therefore I tell it to nobody but you and Mrs. Reynolds. Through the medium of Wroughton, there came an invitation and proposal from T. S., that C. L. should write some scenes in a speaking pantomime, the other parts of which Tom now, and his father formerly, have manufactured between them. So, in the Christmas holydays, my brother and his two great associates, we expect, will be all three damned together: this is, I mean, if Charles's share, which is done and sent in, is accepted."

P. G. Patmore, in his book *My Friends and Acquaintances*, refers to a comic opera, now in the British Museum, as being the work in question; but I cannot share his view either that the MS. is in Lamb's handwriting, or that it represents scenes in a speaking pantomime. It is more than likely that Lamb's contribution either was useless for the Sheridans' purpose or was destroyed in the fire at Drury Lane in February, 1809.

In the same letter Mary Lamb remarks, "You cannot think how very much we miss you and H. [Hazlitt] of a Wednesday evening. All the glory of the night, I may say, is at an end. Phillips makes his jokes, and there is no one to applaud him; Rickman argues, and there is no one to oppose him. The worst miss of all to me is, that, when we are in the dismals, there is now no hope of relief from any quarter whatsoever. Hazlitt was most brilliant, most ornamental, as a Wednesday-man; but he was a more useful one on common days, when he dropt in after a quarrel or a fit of the glooms." Lamb adds at the end:

"There came this morning a printed prospectus from S. T. Coleridge, Grasmere, of a weekly paper, to be called The Friend —a flaming prospectus—I have no time to give the heads of it—to commence first Saturday in January. There came also a notice of a Turkey from Mr. Clarkson, which I am more sanguine in expecting the accomplishment of than I am of Coleridge's prophecy."

## CHAPTER XXV

### 1809 AND 1810

The Move to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane—Robert Lloyd in London—The Godwins at Home—*Poetry for Children*—Two Visits to Winterslow—Mary Lamb Ill Again—Teetotal Experiments—The *Reflector*.

THE principal event in the Lambs' life in 1809 was their removal from Mitre Court Buildings, their comfortable home since 1801, to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane, via Southampton Buildings, where they stayed for a brief while. None of these three buildings now remain.

Lamb sends the news to Manning in the letter of March 28th. "Don't come any more to Mitre Court Buildings. We are at 34, Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, and shall be here till about the end of May: then we remove to No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, where I mean to live and die; for I have such horror of moving, that I would not take a benefice from the King, if I was not indulged with non-residence. . . . Was I Diogenes, I would not move out of a kilderkin into a hogshead, though the first had had nothing but small beer in it, and the second reeked claret. Our place of final destination,—I don't mean the grave, but No. 2 [4] Inner Temple Lane,—looks out upon a gloomy churchyard-like court, called Hare Court, with three trees and a pump in it. Do you know it? I was born near it, and used to drink at that pump when I was a Rechabite of six years old." The same letter states that Holcroft has just died. Lamb adds, "How do you like the little Mandarinesses? are you on some little footing with any of them?"

Writing to Coleridge on June 7th, to congratulate him on the appearance of the *Friend*, the first number of which was dated June 1st, 1809, Lamb gives particulars of his new home. "I have two rooms on third floor and five rooms above, with an inner staircase to myself, and all new painted, &c., and all for

£30 a year! I came into them on Saturday week; and on Monday following, Mary was taken ill with fatigue of moving, and affected, I believe, by the novelty of the home; she could not sleep, and I am left alone with a maid quite a stranger to me, and she has a month or two's sad distraction to go through. What sad large pieces it cuts out of life—out of *her* life, who is getting rather old; and we may not have many years to live together. I am weaker, and bear it worse than I ever did. But I hope we shall be comfortable by and bye." Mary Lamb's illness made it necessary to postpone a visit to the Hazlitts at Winterslow, which was to have been paid in July, until later in the year.

We have sight of some of Lamb's circle in the ecstatic letters of Robert Lloyd to his wife in March and April, 1809. He was then on a visit to London, passing excitedly from one lion to another—from Godwin to Lamb, from Mrs. Siddons to James White, and so forth. The glimpses of the Godwin household are priceless. Late in March, 1809, he writes: "We supped with *Godwin*, and from him I am this moment returned, (twelve o'clock). You would, I know, my dear love, have been delighted in beholding his family; he appears to keep no servants, and his children to occupy their places. I was much gratified in seeing the three children of Mrs. Wollstonecraft, two girls and a son. One of the girls, the eldest, is a sweet, unaffected creature about fourteen. She handed me porter, and attracted much of my attention. Mrs. Godwin is *not* a pleasant woman, a wife far different from the one you would suppose *such* a man would have selected." Again, on March 31st: "I drank tea in company with Mr. Godwin last night; he is a most delightful Man—the modulation of his voice was beautiful, and his language uncommonly correct. I shall call upon him again to-morrow, to give him an order; poor Man, he is much to be felt for." And on April 3rd: "I spent Saturday Evening with Mr. Godwin. He is a delightful man, and mild as a child—his accents are most fascinating. The Picture of Mrs. Wollstonecraft [hangs] over the fireplace."

But this passage is the gem of Robert Lloyd's London letters: "I spent yesterday [April 2nd] with Lamb and his sister—it is sweetly gratifying to see them. They were not up when I went. Mary (his sister) the moment I entered the Room, calling from

her chamber, said—'Robert, I am coming.' They appear to sleep in Rooms next each other. If we may use the expression, their Union of affection is what we conceive of marriage in Heaven. They are the World *one* to the *other*. They are writing a Book of Poetry for children together."

*Poetry for Children*, "entirely original, by the Author of *Mrs. Leicester's School*," which Mrs. Godwin published in two volumes in the summer of 1809, is now excessively rare. The verses, though not equal in dramatic interest, and indeed seldom in technique, to the *Original Poems* by Ann and Jane Taylor and Adelaide O'Keeffe, with which they were, I imagine, intended by the publisher to compete, have much charm and sweetness; and they form another illustration of the imaginative power of this old bachelor and old maid (to use Lamb's phrase) in divining what things interest children, and of the tenacity of their memory of their own infancy. Throughout the two little volumes charity, tolerance, thoughtfulness—those watchwords of the two authors—are much insisted upon, directly and indirectly.

Although the poems are unsigned it is not difficult to apportion most of the pieces to their respective writers. One of the most charming of Charles Lamb's contributions is this:—

THE DESSERT

With the apples and the plums
Little Carolina comes,
At the time of the dessert she
Comes and drops her new last curt'sy;
Graceful curt'sy, practis'd o'er
In the nursery before.
What shall we compare her to?
The dessert itself will do.
Like preserves she's kept with care,
Like blanch'd almonds she is fair,
Soft as down on peach her hair,
And so soft, so smooth is each
Pretty cheek as that same peach,
Yet more like in hue to cherries;
Then her lips, the sweet strawberries,
Caroline herself shall try them
If they are not like when nigh them;
Her bright eyes are black as sloes,
But I think we've none of those
Common fruit here—and her chin
From a round point does begin,
Like the small end of a pear;

Whiter drapery she does wear
Than the frost on cake; and sweeter
Than the cake itself, and neater,
Though bedeck'd with emblems fine,
Is our little Caroline.

And in this beautiful and touching little story we see the flower of the more serious of the poems, which I should like to think was from Mary Lamb's pen :—

BLINDNESS

In a stage-coach, where late I chanc'd to be,
A little quiet girl my notice caught;
I saw she look'd at nothing by the way,
Her mind seem'd busy on some childish thought.

I with an old man's courtesy address'd
The child, and call'd her pretty dark-eyed maid,
And bid her turn those pretty eyes and see
The wide extended prospect. "Sir," she said,

"I cannot see the prospect, I am blind."
Never did tongue of child utter a sound
So mournful, as her words fell on my ear.
Her mother then related how she found

Her child was sightless. On a fine bright day
She saw her lay her needlework aside,
And, as on such occasions mothers will,
For leaving off her work began to chide.

"I'll do it when 'tis day-light, if you please;
I cannot work, Mamma, now it is night."
The sun shone bright upon her when she spoke,
And yet her eyes receiv'd no ray of light.

One piece, "The Beggar Man," which I quote in Chapter XXVIII., was contributed by John Lamb the younger. In the little fables that occur from time to time we may perhaps see the paternal influence, the apologue drawn from bird life being evidently a favourite form with John Lamb the elder, as a glance at Appendix IV. will show.

*Poetry for Children* was allowed quickly to go out of print in England, and the two little volumes are now of extreme rarity. Many of the pieces reappeared in compilations by W. F. Mylius, a schoolmaster whose works were published by the Godwins; while an American edition was issued in Boston in 1812.

In the same letter to Coleridge from which I have quoted above—June 7th—Lamb speaks of his literary plans. "We have

almost worked ourselves out of child's work, and I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think of a drama, but I have no head for play-making; I can do the dialogue, and that's all. I am quite aground for a plan, and I must do something for money. Not that I have immediate wants, but I have prospective ones. O money, money, how blindly thou hast been worshipped, and how stupidly abused! Thou art health, and liberty, and strength; and he that has thee may rattle his pockets at the foul fiend!"

Besides the rhymed story of *Prince Dorus* for Godwin (and possibly but, I think, most improbably, that of *Beauty and the Beast* for the same publisher), we know of nothing more from Lamb's pen until his essays for Leigh Hunt's *Reflector* in 1811-12.

One more quotation from the letter to Coleridge of June 7th: "Have you read 'Cœlebs?'[1] It has reached eight editions in so many weeks; yet literally it is one of the very poorest sort of common novels, with the draw-back of dull religion in it. Had the religion been high and flavoured, it would have been something. I borrowed this 'Cœlebs in Search of a Wife' of a very careful, neat lady, and returned it with this stuff written in the beginning:—

> 'If ever I marry a wife
> I'd marry a landlord's daughter,
> For then I may sit in the bar,
> And drink cold brandy-and-water.'"

The next letter to Coleridge—dated October 30th—has news. "I have but this moment received your letter, dated the 9th instant, having just come off a journey from Wiltshire, where I have been with Mary on a visit to Hazlitt. The journey has been of infinite service to her. We have had nothing but sunshiny days and daily walks from eight to twenty miles a-day, have seen Wilton, Salisbury, Stonehenge, &c. Her illness lasted but six weeks; it left her weak, but the country has made us whole." The visit to Winterslow was made in company with Martin Burney and either his uncle, Colonel Phillips, or the other Phillips, the faithful friend of the Burneys. Martin and Phillips stayed, however, only for two weeks.

Hazlitt has given us, in his "Farewell to Essay Writing" (in *Winterslow*), a glimpse of his other visitors: "I used to walk

[1] By Hannah More.

out at this time with Mr. and Miss Lamb of an evening, to look at the Claude Lorraine skies over our heads melting from azure into purple and gold, and to gather mushrooms, that sprung up at our feet, to throw into our hashed mutton at supper." And in a letter to Manning a little later Lamb tells of one of the lighter incidents of the holiday. "A constable in Salisbury Cathedral was telling me that eight people dined at the top of the spire of the cathedral; upon which I remarked, that they must be very sharp-set."

Writing to Sarah Hazlitt on November 7th, Mary Lamb says, "The dear, quiet, lazy, delicious month we spent with you is remembered by me with such regret, that I feel quite discontent and Winterslow-sick. I assure you, I never passed such a pleasant time in the country in my life, both in the house and out of it, the card playing quarrels, and a few gaspings for breath after your swift footsteps up the high hills, excepted; and those drawbacks are not unpleasant in the recollection. We have got some salt butter to make our toast seem like yours, and we have tried to eat meat suppers, but that would not do, for we left our appetites behind us. . . ."

Mary Lamb adds a piece of good news: "A man in the India House has resigned, by which Charles will get twenty pounds a year; and White has prevailed on him to write some more lottery-puffs. If that ends in smoke, the twenty pounds is a sure card, and has made us very joyful." The addition of the £20 would bring Lamb's salary to £160, exclusive of the gratuities and money for overtime. Of his lottery puffs we shall probably never know any more. They were, I imagine, written for Bish, the principal Lottery contractor, whose devices to interest speculators were very varied and ingenious.

The correspondence of 1810 opens with a letter to Robert Lloyd—the last that was to be; and on January 2nd Lamb sends Manning a light-hearted medley of truth and fancy. "I have published a little book for children on titles of honour: and to give them some idea of the difference of rank and gradual rising, I have made a little scale, supposing myself to receive the following various accessions of dignity from the king, who is the fountain of honour—As at first, 1, Mr. C. Lamb; 2, C. Lamb, Esq.; 3, Sir C. Lamb, Bart.; 4, Baron Lamb of Stamford, where my family came from: I have chosen that if ever I should have

my choice; 5, Viscount Lamb; 6, Earl Lamb; 7, Marquis Lamb; 8, Duke Lamb. It would look like quibbling to carry it on further, and especially as it is not necessary for children to go beyond the ordinary titles of sub-regal dignity in our own country, otherwise I have sometimes in my dreams imagined myself still advancing, as 9th, King Lamb; 10th, Emperor Lamb; 11th, Pope Innocent; higher than which is nothing but the Lamb of God."

In the letter to Coleridge of October 30th, 1809, Lamb had described his Inner Temple Lane rooms: "I have put up shelves. You never saw a book-case in more true harmony with the contents, than what I've nailed up in a room, which, though new, has more aptitudes for growing old than you shall often see—as one sometimes gets a friend in the middle of life, who becomes an old friend in a short time. My rooms are luxurious; one is for prints and one for books; a Summer and a Winter parlour. When shall I ever see you in them?" He describes them more fully to Manning: "I have two of these rooms on the third floor, and five sleeping, cooking, &c., rooms, on the fourth floor. In my best room is a choice collection of the works of Hogarth, an English painter of some humour. In my next best are shelves containing a small but well-chosen library. My best room commands a court, in which there are trees and a pump, the water of which is excellent—cold with brandy, and not very insipid without. Here I hope to set up my rest, and not quit till Mr. Powell, the undertaker, gives me notice that I may have possession of my last lodging. He lets lodgings for single gentlemen."

Before passing to 1810 I would say that in 1809 were born both Edward FitzGerald and Alfred Tennyson.

The year 1810 begins with a long blank interval, in part of which it is more than likely that Mary Lamb was ill; but in July she was well enough to visit Winterslow again. On this occasion the Lambs returned by way of Oxford, travelling thus far in Hazlitt's company. In Hazlitt's essay "On the Conversation of Authors" we read: "L. once came down into the country to see us. He was 'like the most capricious poet Ovid among the Goths.' The country people thought him an oddity, and did not understand his jokes. It would be strange if they had; for he did not make any, while he staied. But when we crossed the country to Oxford, then he spoke a

little. He and the old colleges were 'hail-fellow well met;' and in the quadrangles, he 'walked gowned.'"[1] In another essay on "The Character of the Country People," in the *Examiner* in 1819, Hazlitt describes how Lamb ordered some brown or snuff-coloured breeches from the local tailor, but was fitted instead with a pair of lively Lincoln green, in which, however, he insisted on riding in triumph to Newbury and Oxford in the carrier's cart; "the abstract idea of the jest of the thing prevailing in his mind (as it always does) over the sense of personal dignity". The 1810 holiday was not so happy as that of the previous year, and it ended in another attack of illness for Mary Lamb which lasted well into September.

A letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to Crabb Robinson on November 6th has bad news. "I am much afraid that Miss Lamb is very poorly. . . . Charles speaks of the necessity of absolute quiet and at the same time of being obliged sometimes to have company that they would be better without. Surely in such a case as theirs it would be right to select whom they will admit, admit those only whom they are likely to be bettered by society. . . . Pray, as you are most likely to see *Charles* at least from time to time, tell me how they are going on. There is nobody in the world out of our own house for whom I am more deeply interested." Mary Lamb was not, I think, ill in her ordinary sense of the word—that is mentally—but only physically. She did not leave the Temple and was able to write letters.

Writing to Hazlitt on November 28th, thanking him for a pig, Lamb amplifies Miss Wordsworth's account. "Mary has been very ill indeed since you saw her; that is, as ill as she can be to remain at home. But she is a good deal better now, owing to a very careful regimen. She drinks nothing but water, and never goes out; she does not even go to the Captain's. Her indisposition has been ever since that night you left town; the night Miss W[ordsworth] came. Her coming, and that d——d Mrs. Godwin coming and staying so late that night, so overset her that she lay broad awake all that night, and it was by a miracle that she escaped a very bad illness, which I thoroughly expected. I have made up my mind that she shall never have any one in the house again with her, and that no one shall sleep with her, not

[1] The phrase is from Lamb's sonnet quoted on page 19 of Vol. II.

even for a night; for it is a very serious thing to be always living with a kind of fever upon her; and therefore I am sure you will take it in good part if I say that if Mrs. Hazlitt comes to town at any time, however glad we shall be to see her in the daytime, I cannot ask her to spend a night under our roof. Some decision we must come to, for the harassing fever that we have both been in, owing to Miss Wordsworth's coming, is not to be borne; and I would rather be dead than so alive."

Dorothy Wordsworth had visited the Lambs for a week in the summer and was intending to return to them in the autumn, from Christopher Wordsworth's at Binfield; but Mary Lamb's relapse made this impossible. Writing to her on November 13th, Mary Lamb gives news not only of herself but of Coleridge, who, the *Friend* being no more, had just come to London from Greta Hall intending to stay with the Montagus in Frith Street, Soho, for some months; but owing to an unhappy circumstance, of which we shall presently hear, he moved almost at once to the Morgans', at 7 Portland Place, Hammersmith, on a visit which, as it turned out, was to last more or less continuously for some five years. He seems to have been entertaining the idea of placing himself in the hands of Sir Anthony Carlisle with a view to conquering his drug habit.

Mary Lamb's other news is that she has a new servant, aged twenty-seven, of plain figure. Lamb adds a postscript: "Mary has left a little space for me to fill up with nonsense, as the Geographers used to cram monsters in the voids of their maps and call it Terra Incognita. She has told you how she has taken to water, like a hungry otter. I too limp after her in lame imitation, but it goes against me a little *at first*. I have been *aquavorous* now for full four days and it seems a moon. I am full of cramps, and rheumatisms, and cold internally, so that fire won't warm me, yet I bear all for virtue's sake. Must I then leave you, Gin, Rum, Brandy, Aqua Vitæ—pleasant jolly fellows? Damn Temperance and them that first invented it, some Ante Noahite. Coleridge has powdered his head, and looks like Bacchus, Bacchus ever sleek and young. He is going to turn sober, but his Clock has not struck yet."

In another joint letter to Dorothy Wordsworth, dated November 23rd, Mary Lamb remarks of water-drinking, that though "a flat thing," it has become very easy to her, and that Charles

perseveres in it most manfully. Lamb adds: "We are in a pickle. Mary from her affectation of physiognomy has hired a stupid big country wench, who looked honest, as she thought, and has been doing her work some days, but without eating—eats no butter nor meat, but prefers cheese with her tea for breakfast—and now it comes out that she was ill when she came, with lifting her mother about (who is now with God) when she was dying, and with riding up from Norfolk 4 days and nights in the waggon. She got advice yesterday and took something which has made her bring up a quart of blood, and she now lies, a dead weight upon our humanity, in her bed, incapable of getting up, refusing to go into an hospital, having no body in town but a poor asthmatic dying Uncle whose son lately married a drab who fills his house, and there is no where she can go, and she seems to have made up her mind to take her flight to heaven from our bed.—O God! O God!—for the little wheelbarrow which trundled the Hunchback from door to door to try the various charities of different professions of Mankind! Here's her Uncle just crawled up, he is far liker Death than He."

One glimpse of Lamb we have at the end of this year, in Crabb Robinson's reminiscences. Robinson seems to have been at 4 Inner Temple Lane on December 10th. He records: "A talk about Shakspeare. C. Lamb spoke with admiration of 'Love's Labours Lost' and 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' Coleridge did not concur. But they agreed in this, that not a line of 'Titus Andronicus' could have been written by Shakspeare."

Finally there is in late December, or early January, 1811, a letter from Mary Lamb to Sarah Hazlitt, telling her of various small events—a too social evening at Godwin's; another at the Burney's, when Charles's new water-drinking habit gave out; Mrs. Clarkson's illness; Mrs. Rickman's loss of a baby and Mrs. John Hazlitt's miscarriage. "I am glad I am an old maid; for, you see, there is nothing but misfortune in the marriage state."

Before passing to 1811 I should say that the year 1810 was important in Lamb's literary life by reason of an engagement which it brought him, brief but fruitful. He was now thirty-five, an age when surprises are over and a man knows fairly well what he is going to do; he had made many experiments; he had written a sentimental novel and comic paragraphs for the papers, a blank verse play, poetry, and a farce; he had worked dry his

invention for the nursery, and he had re-discovered the old dramatists; but he had not yet discovered his own true line. The time was, however, drawing near; for Leigh Hunt, and his brother John, a printer, had projected a new quarterly, to be called the *Reflector*, and to be written mainly by old Christ's Hospitallers, of whom Lamb was not least important. Among the others were Thomas Barnes and Barron Field, both of whom we shall see something of in the ensuing pages.

When Leigh Hunt first came to know Lamb at all intimately I have not discovered. He knew him by sight when he was still a boy at Christ's Hospital, as we have seen, but between then and 1810, when the *Reflector* was founded, is a blank. That John Lamb knew Hunt may be gathered from the circumstance that his name is among the subscribers to Hunt's *Juvenilia* in 1801. George Dyer's and Barron Field's are also there, while Cobbett took 12 copies.

The *Reflector* gave Lamb his first encouragement to spread his wings with some of the freedom that an essayist demands. He did not make the fullest use of it; he was not yet ready to be the chartered egotist that he afterwards became: diffidence, humility, mistrust, stood in his way; but it is not too much to say that had he lacked the preliminary training which his *Reflector* exercises gave him his *Elia* essays would have been the poorer. One indeed of the *Reflector* pieces afterwards became an *Elia* essay—the "Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People;" while the fine critical acumen displayed in two of the *Reflector* essays, those upon Hogarth and Shakespeare's Tragedies, was never excelled in his later writings.

Lamb's letters—at this period very infrequent and uninforming—say nothing of his *Reflector* work, which we may suppose occupied most of the time he could spare from the office and from whist and talk, and which accounts largely for the poverty of the correspondence; but that he held the *Reflector* papers in some honour is proved by the circumstance, as we shall see, that when in 1818 he collected his *Works* in prose and verse (thinking his literary career was over), he gave a place to all but two or three.

The *Reflector* ceased abruptly with its fourth number; but its work, so far as we are concerned, was done.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### 1811

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* Begins—Lamb on Wordsworth and Coleridge—Lamb's Scotchman—Death of George Burnett—Lamb's Puns—*Prince Dorus*—"Poor Coleridge" and "Poor Lamb"—Hazlitt's Son Born—Death of Robert Lloyd—Coleridge and Lamb on Shakespeare—The Godwins.

WITH the year 1811 we begin regularly to see the Lamb household through the eyes of their familiar friend Henry Crabb Robinson—a peculiarly fortunate circumstance, since Lamb's correspondence is so meagre at this period. Robinson's *Diary* has been in part published under the editorship of the late Thomas Sadler; but very much was omitted, and what remained was often altered without, I think, any gain in force. With the permission of the trustees of Dr. Williams' Library, where the Crabb Robinson papers are preserved, I have made a new copy of such passages as relate to Lamb and his circle.

Stimulated by the perusal of the *Diary* of Thomas Holcroft, which had been lent him by Holcroft's widow, afterwards Mrs. James Kenney, Robinson made his first entry on January 8th, 1811. We come to Lamb at once:—

"January 8th, 1811:—Spent part of the evening with Charles Lamb (unwell) and his sister. He had just read the 'Curse of Kehama,' which he said he liked better than any of Southey's long poems. The descriptions he thought beautiful, particularly the finding of Kailyal by Ereenia. He liked the opening, and part of the description of hell; but, after all, he was not made happier by reading the poem. There is too much trick in it. The three statues and the vacant space for Kehama resemble a pantomime scene; and the love is ill managed. On the whole however, Charles Lamb thinks the poem infinitely superior to 'Thalaba.'

"We spoke of Wordsworth and Coleridge. To my surprise, Lamb asserted the latter to be the greater man. He preferred the 'Ancient Mariner' to anything Wordsworth had written. He thought the latter too apt to force his own individual feel-

ings on the reader, instead of, like Shakespeare, entering fully into the feelings of others. This, I observed, is very much owing to the lyrical character of Wordsworth's poems. And Lamb concluded by expressing high admiration of Wordsworth, and especially of the Sonnets. He also spoke in high praise of 'Hart-leap Well' as one of his most exquisite pieces; but did not think highly of the Leech-gatherer.

"Some one, speaking of Shakespeare, mentioned his anachronism in which Hector speaks of Aristotle. 'That's what Johnson referred to,' said Lamb, 'when he wrote—

And panting Time toils after him in vain.'

"The other day C. L. related to me a droll anecdote of Smith, whom we met at Godwin's. . . . He had been shewing S. an engraving of a female figure which he deems handsome, and on leaving it exclaimed, 'Well, what do you think of *my beauty*?' Smith became quite grave and embarrassed and said, 'Why, sir,—from all that I have heard of you as well as from what I have myself seen, I certainly entertain a very high opinion of your abilities, but I confess that I have not yet thought or formed any opinion concerning your personal pretensions!' [This incident, some ten years later, was recalled for use in the *Elia* essay "Imperfect Sympathies."] Smith is a Scotchman who was a long while prisoner in France. . . . 'He has a most literal understanding,' said C. L., 'and represented me as a gross flatterer because I out of fun paid a person in his presence some ridiculous compliments, which every one else understood, and called my sister the parasite of his wife because she praised one of her caps.'"

A few days later Robinson gives a dreary glimpse of two of Lamb's early acquaintances. "January 12, 1811:—Mrs. Chas. Aikin related to me a deplorable tale of the situation in which Mr. Burnet [George Burnett] . . . is at present, literally starving." Robinson mentions also the distress of Mrs. Fenwick (the wife of "Ralph Bigod") and records the determination to avoid all personal expense that is called for merely by indolence, or love of enjoyment or vanity, since he has so many impecunious and thriftless friends and acquaintances. Robinson took up Burnett's case with his customary stern kindness, and spoke of him to Walter of the *Times* and to Arthur Aikin; but, as we shall shortly see, it was too late.

"Sunday, Jan. 20, 1811:—A long tête à tête with Mary Lamb. A confidential gossiping.

"Jan. 23, 1811:—At C. Lamb's . . . Coleridge, Morgan, Rickman &c. Coleridge in bad form. Very wordy.

"Feb. 24, 1811:—Evening, a very large party to supper. The Amyots, including Taylor of Norwich, Amyot's old friend and fellow clerk, the three Stansfields, Mrs. Holcroft, the Lambs, Tomalin, the Bakewells." Thomas Amyot, who had been a solicitor's clerk in Norwich, became private secretary to William Windham, M.P. (John Lamb's opponent in the matter of humanity to animals), and afterwards Registrar in London of the West India Slaves. Taylor, of Norwich, was, of course, William Taylor, the philosopher and critic, translator of Bürger and Goethe, a friend of Burnett and Southey, and George Borrow's instructor in German. The Stansfields were friends of Robinson. It was Tomalin, a friend of Robinson and the Colliers, who helped John Payne Collier to make a shorthand report of Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures in this year—the only record of them that we possess. Robert Bakewell was the geologist. The Lambs do not seem to have known intimately any of their fellow-guests except Mrs. Holcroft.

Robinson's next entry serves as an amusing footnote to Lamb's essay on George Dawe, now an A.R.A.:—

"March 4, 1811:—Dawe shewed me a painting of a naked figure huddled up into itself in an attitude intended for a Mad Tom, but the figure he is sensible is too muscular for such a character. He thinks of converting him into the maniac mentioned in the New Testament.

"March 6, 1811:—After dinner called on C. Lamb; heard from him that Geo. Burnett had died wretchedly in a workhouse. Hazlitt and Coleridge were there and seemed sensibly affected by the circumstance. There certainly was every reason for strong sympathy, founded on similarity of pursuits and in a like want of fortune, and dependence on literary talents for support. Burnett's age was only thirty-four or five, a year younger than Lamb.[1]

[1] Part of Burnett's tragedy is perhaps explained by Coleridge's remark in a letter to Southey in 1804: "I met G. Burnett the day before yesterday in Lincoln's Inn Fields, so nervous, so helpless, with such opium-stupidly-wild eyes."

"March 8, 1811:—I then called on W. Hazlitt. Learnt that Miss Lamb had had a renewal of her attack. H. thinks that Burnett's death occasioned the present relapse. . . . H. thinks that poor Miss L. as well as her brother is injured by Coleridge's presence in town, and their frequent visits and constant company at home, which keep their minds in perpetual fever."

Robinson repeats this opinion in a letter to his brother, Thomas Robinson, on March 14th: "Poor Mary Lamb has been attacked again by her shocking malady. It has been, I fear, precipitated by Coleridge's company, which I think has a dreadful effect upon her nerves and shatters her frame. The conversation of such a man, whose eloquence is full of passion and mystical philosophy, a compound of poetry, metaphysics, plaintive egotism and diseased sensibility, continued for hours to a late hour in the night, is enough to disorder a sane but susceptible frame, much more rouse a dormant disease of imagination. Poor Coleridge is himself an object of compassion."

Coleridge, writing to Robinson at this time, says, "I have been extremely unwell, though rather better. George Burnett's death told too abruptly, and, in truth, exaggerated,[1] overset my dear, most dear, and most excellent friend and heart's sister, Mary Lamb—and her illness has almost overset me. Troubles, God knows! have thronged about me—alas! alas! all my dearest friends I have of late either suffered *from* [a reference to Wordsworth, as we shall see], or suffered *for*. 'Tis a cruel sort of world we live in."

The next entry, belonging to the same date, throws a little light on the occasional coolnesses which, before their serious breach, interrupted the intimacy of Lamb and Hazlitt:—

"March 8, 1811:—He [Hazlitt] had applied a little while before to C. L. for money which C. L. had not sent him, for he (W. H.) had before received relief from him (C. L.) with a promise not to apply again for six months. This circumstance agrees with what Mrs. C. Aikin related to me on Tuesday—he had offended them by an improper application to which they had shewn no attention.

[1] Meaning, an exaggeration of the melancholy circumstances of Burnett's death. Coleridge was not anticipating a famous pleasantry by Mark Twain.

"March 16, 1811 :—C. Lamb stepped in to announce Dr. Tuthill's defeat as candidate for the post of physician to St. Luke's Hospital. He accompanied me and Mrs. Collier to Covent Garden. *Cato* was acted . . . *Bluebeard* followed, to the delight of a crowded audience. C. L. was seemingly very merry—his sister's illness I dare say leaves him in no other state than outward affliction or violent and false spirits which he works himself into to subdue his real feeling." Tuthill—afterwards Sir George—on a later occasion was elected to St. Luke's Hospital. Mrs. Collier was the wife of John Dyer Collier, and mother of John Payne Collier.

"March 29, 1811 :—I spent the evening with W. Hazlitt. Smith, his wife and son, Hume, Coleridge and afterwards Lamb were there. . . . Before Lamb came C. had spoken with warmth of his excellent serious conversation. H. imputed his puns to humility." Smith was probably the Scotchman whom we met above ; Hume was Joseph Hume of Somerset House, whom we have seen. Hazlitt's remark on Lamb's puns is very interesting : meaning, I take it, that Lamb often had wiser things to say than he would utter, but, fearing perhaps that he might go beyond the apprehension of certain of the company and make them uncomfortable, he preferred to maintain a lower and friendlier level by indulging in nonsense.

"March 30, 1811 :—Accompanied C. Lamb to the Lyceum. The *Siege of Belgrade* . . . Braham's singing. . . . On returning to C. L.'s found Coleridge and W. Hazlitt there. . . . When Dignum and Mrs. Bland came on the stage together, C. L. exclaimed

'And lo, two puddings smoked upon the board!'

"May 15, 1811 :—A very pleasant call on Charles and Mary Lamb. Read his version of the story of Prince Dorus, the long-nosed king. Gossipped about writing. Urged him to try his hand at a metrical *Umarbeitung* (working up) of 'Reynard the Fox.' He believed, he said, in the excellence of the work, but he was sure such a version as I suggested would not succeed now. The sense of humour, he maintained, is utterly extinct. No satire that is not personal will succeed. I spoke of 'Rameau and Nephew.' He spoke highly of it without knowing it was translated by me ; having no idea where he had seen it. He urged

me to show him whatever I had written about the German authors and literature." Robinson translated *Amatonda* from the German of Anton Wall (Christian Lebrecht Heyne) which, with a few fragments from Jean Paul Richter, was published anonymously by Longmans in 1811. "Rameau and Nephew" is by Diderot. Lamb's *Prince Dorus*, a fairy tale in rhyme, founded on the French, was published by Godwin in 1811.

"May 28, 1811:—Called on Godwin. Found C. Lamb and his sister there.

"June 3, 1811:—I concluded the evening with C. Lamb. I read him 'The Wanderer' and 'Cupid as Landscape Painter,' which he seemed to be pleased with." These are two sketches by Goethe, of which Robinson probably had made translations.

"June 13, 1811. Thursday:—A call on C. Lamb. His brother was with him. A chat on puns. He denied Pitchford's to be good [that Evanson, author of a work on the Dissonance of the Gospel stating St. Luke to be most worthy of credence, is a 'lukewarm Christian'] and quoted two as better. He was with a friend reading a book of travels in the east who observed of the Mantchu Tartars that they were cannibals, on which C. Lamb observed that the Chinese were certainly of the race of Celtes [Sell-teas]. The large room in the accountant's office at the East India House is divided into boxes or compartments, in each of which sit six clerks, Charles Lamb himself in one. They are called Compounds. The meaning of the word was asked one day, and Lamb said it was 'a collection of simples.' We spoke of the Stafford pictures. C. L. did not much admire the collection. He thought the 'Seasons' of Titian one of the finest, and the muleteer of Correggio most excellent merely for the wonderful expression of motion in the figures.

"June 21, 1811:—C. and M. Lamb, Dr. and Mrs. Adams, Barron Field, Wright and M. Andrews spent the evening. . . . We sat up late. C. L. was very merry; his puns were more numerous than select. He made one good pun. Field had said 'Who ever puns will steal—I always button my pockets when in company with a punster.' Some one said, 'Punsters have no pocket.' 'No,' said C. L., 'they have no pocket, they carry only a ridicule.'" The party was at the Colliers'. Dr. Joseph Adams was the biographer of Hunter and the friend who recommended Coleridge to the care of Gillman in 1816.

Waller Rodwell Wright was a lawyer, an old friend of Robinson, and the author of *Horae Ionicae*. Andrews was Mord Andrews.

"July 10 [Wednesday], 1811:—Took tea with C. Lamb, the Wednesday evening parties being resumed.

"July 21, 1811:—A call on C. Lamb. L. had met with an accident (H. Wodd had nearly put out his eye by throwing a pen full of ink into it)." Wodd was the India House clerk of whom Lamb wrote an epigram which I quote in Chapter XLII.

On July 24th, 1811, Robinson records that he went late to Lamb's and found a large party there, among them Southey, fresh from a visit to William Blake. There is no evidence that Lamb ever met Blake, but we know from a letter to Barton in 1824 that he admired him and understood him. Robinson records a most interesting conversation with the poet-painter.

"August 3rd, 1811:—In the evening at Charles Lamb's. He was serious, and therefore very interesting. I accidentally made use of the expression 'poor Coleridge!' Lamb corrected me, not angrily, but as if really pained. 'He is,' he said, 'a fine fellow, in spite of all his faults and weaknesses. Call him Coleridge; I hate *poor*, as applied to such a man. I can't bear to hear such a man pitied.' He then quoted an expression to the same effect by (I think) Ben Jonson, of Bacon." [1]

(I am tempted to quote here the following passage from Mr. Birrell's first series of *Obiter Dicta*:—

"One grows sick of the expressions, 'poor Charles Lamb,' 'gentle Charles Lamb,' as if he were one of those grown-up children of the Leigh Hunt type, who are perpetually begging and borrowing through the round of every man's acquaintance. Charles Lamb earned his own living, paid his own way, was the helper, not the helped; a man who was beholden to no one, who always came with gifts in his hand, a shrewd man, capable of advice, strong in council. Poor Lamb, indeed! Poor Coleridge, robbed of his will; poor Wordsworth, devoured by his own *ego;* poor Southey, writing his tomes and deeming himself a classic; poor Carlyle, with his nine volumes of memoirs, where he

> 'Lies like a hedgehog rolled up the wrong way,
> Tormenting himself with his prickles'—

[1] This would be the passage (from *Timber*): "Lord S. Alban. . . . My conceit of his person was never increased toward him by his place or honors. But I have and do reverence him for the greatness that was only proper to himself in that he seemed to me ever by his work one of the greatest men and most worthy of admiration that had been in many ages. In his adversity I ever prayed that God would give him strength; for greatness he could not want. Neither could I condole in a word or syllable for him, as knowing no accident could do harm to virtue, but rather help to make it manifest."

call these men poor, if you feel it decent to do so, but not Lamb, who was rich in all that makes life valuable or memory sweet. But he used to get drunk. This explains all. Be untruthful, unfaithful, unkind; darken the lives of all who have to live under your shadow, rob youth of joy, take peace from age, live unsought for, die unmourned—and remaining sober you will escape the curse of men's pity, and be spoken of as a worthy person. But if ever, amidst what Burns called 'social noise,' you so far forget yourself as to get drunk, think not to plead a spotless life spent with those for whom you have laboured and saved; talk not of the love of friends or of help given to the needy: least of all make reference to a noble self-sacrifice passing the love of women, for all will avail you nothing. You get drunk—and the heartless and the selfish and the lewd crave the privilege of pitying you, and receiving your name with an odious smile.")

Crabb Robinson again:—

"August 25, 1811:—A call on C. Lamb late. I began *Faust* to him. He did not appear to relish it much, though he said it was good." And here comes a long interval during Robinson's absence from town.

The Lambs, frightened perhaps by their experience of the previous year, did not leave London in the summer of 1811. Writing to Sarah Hazlitt on October 2nd (on the occasion of the birth of William Hazlitt, the younger), Mary Lamb says of her brother, "He is now looking over me, he is always in my way for he has had a month's holiday at home, but I am happy to say they end on Monday—when mine begin, for I am going to pass a week at Richmond with Mrs. Burney. She has been dying but she went to the Isle of Wight and recovered once more, and she is finishing her recovery at Richmond. When there I intend to read Novels and play at Piquet all day long." Lamb adds a postscript to Hazlitt: "Well, my blessing and heaven's be upon him, and make him like his father, with something a better temper and a smoother head of hair, and then all the men and women must love him."

Mr. W. C. Hazlitt prints in *Lamb and Hazlitt* some verses written on the occasion of the birth of William the younger. He does not ascribe them to any friend of the family in particular, but I think them very likely to be Mary Lamb's; and in that belief I quote them here.

There lives at Winterslow a man of such
Rare talents and deep learning, that by much
Too wise he's counted by his country neighbours;
And all his learned literary labours
Occasion give for many a wild surmise.
Even his person in their rustic eyes
Has somewhat strange in it, his sallow looks,

His deep o'erhanging brows when o'er his books
(Which written are in characters unknown)
He pores whole hours with a most solemn frown.
And then this wise man's wife they all well know
Is sister to a learned Doctor too.
But we will leave the rustics to their wonder,
And simply tell what truly happen'd under
This wise man's roof. He and his wife believ'd,
If by no inauspicious star deceiv'd,
The time was very fast approaching when
(To crown the labours of his brain and pen)
A nameless Spirit, for whose sake his brains
And pen he wore out, would reward his pains
By visible appearance in their view.
It was not from the magic art they drew
This inference. Lo! when the Spirit came,
The long expected One without a name,
For whose sweet sake all this was undergone,
They call'd it William and their own dear Son.

On October 26th, 1811, Robert Lloyd died, and Lamb sent to his brother, Charles Lloyd, a little memoir which was printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. I quote a few lines from the close: "It seemed as if the affectionate part of his nature could suffer no abatement. The display of what the world calls shining talents would have been incompatible with a character like his; but he oftentimes let fall, in his familiar conversation, and in his letters, bright and original illustrations of feeling which might have been mistaken for genius, if his own watchful modest spirit had not constantly interposed to recall and substitute for them some of the ordinary forms of observation which lay less out of the circle of common sympathy, within which his kind nature delighted to move."

Here we return to Crabb Robinson's *Diary*:—

"Nov. 4, 1811:—After dinner, at Flaxman's, I read to F. Lamb's very fine essay on Hogarth (*Reflector* 3) which I had read before with great delight. F. acknowledged the literary merit of the piece but he by no means concurred in the opinion C. L. maintains that Hogarth is a moral painter. On the contrary F. asserted that he was a very wicked though most witty artist. . . ."

On December 5th Coleridge took "Romeo and Juliet" for the subject of his lecture in the course which he was delivering in Crane Court, Fleet Street. Robinson, writing of the lecture, says that "when C. was so extravagantly running from topic

to topic without any guide whatever, C. L. said: 'This is not so much amiss. C. said in his advertisement he would speak about the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, and so he is delivering the lecture in the character of the Nurse.'

"December 10th, 1811:—Miss Lamb dined with us. After dinner gossipped. In the evening Charles Lamb, Manning,[1] and Mrs. Fenwick. A pleasant evening. Lamb spoke well about Shakespeare. I had objected to Coleridge's assertion in his lecture, that Shakespeare became everything except the vicious; and I observed that if Shakespeare *becoming* a character is to be determined by the truth and vivacity of his delineation, he had *become* some of the vicious characters as well as the virtuous. Lamb justified Coleridge's remark, by saying that Shakespeare never gives characters wholly odious and detestable. I adduced the King in 'Hamlet' as altogether mean; and he allowed this to be the worst of Shakespeare's characters. He has not another like it. I cited Lady Macbeth. 'I think this one of Shakespeare's worst characters,' said Lamb. 'It is also inconsistent with itself. Her sleep-walking does not suit so hardened a being.' . . . I then referred to the Bastard in 'Lear,' but Lamb considered his character as the result of provocation on account of his illegitimacy. Lamb mentioned Iago and Richard III. as admirable illustrations of the skill with which Shakespeare could make his worst characters interesting. I noticed King John and Lewis, as if Shakespeare meant, like a Jacobin, to show how base kings are. Lamb did not remark on this, but said, 'King John' is one of the plays he likes least. He praised 'Richard II.'"

On December 15th Robinson called on the Godwins—a duty-call rather than a pleasure, for he tells us he was rarely comfortable in their house. One of Godwin's remarks bears not only upon Coleridge's but upon Lamb's critical judgment: "Godwin noticed C.'s remark [in his lecture] that Shakespeare's plays are only to be read, not acted, as absolutely false." (Lamb of course said the same thing in his essay on Shakespeare's Tragedies in the *Reflector*.) Godwin added, "No plays but Shakespeare's deserve to be represented, so well are they

[1] Not of course Lamb's Manning, who was in China. In another entry Robinson describes him as the son of Mr. Manning of Exeter (a Dissenting minister).

fitted for performance. . . . On coming away Mrs. G. took me into another room and very angrily reproached me with not bearing anything from G. while I would take anything from C. Lamb." Robinson protested. He afterwards adds, "C. Lamb says rude things, but always in so playful a way that you are sure he means nothing by what he says. Mrs. G. also spoke of the persecution she has to bear from the Lambs, Mrs. Holcroft &c. But I would hear nothing on that subject." What Mrs. Godwin meant by the word "persecution" I do not know. Probably she was one of those persons who would cherish an imagined affront rather than be without any cause of complaint.

Among Robinson's papers in 1811 is a note that "turkies" were to be sent by his brother at Bury to Mrs. Collier, to C. Lamb, No. 4 Inner Temple Lane, and to Captain Burney, 26 James Street, Pimlico. His last entry is: "Dec. 31, 1811:— Closed the year most agreeably [at Flaxman's], I believe in the act of repeating C. Lamb's prologue to 'Mr. H.'"

In this year was born William Makepeace Thackeray.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### 1812

Hazlitt's Christening Party—Benjamin Robert Haydon—Thomas Barnes—"The Triumph of the Whale"—The *Examiner* and the Prince Regent—James Kenney—Coleridge's Quarrel with Wordsworth—Lamb as a Landed Proprietor.

ONE letter only of Lamb's belonging to 1812 has been preserved, and that not a personal one—a criticism of a translation of Horace made by Charles Lloyd, the elder, of Birmingham. Nor does Lamb seem to have written anything of importance, the articles in No. IV. of the *Reflector*, which was published in 1812, being, I think, the work of 1811.

Fortunately we have Crabb Robinson's *Diary*, or the year would be blank indeed. We see the Lambs at once: "January 1st, 1812 [Wednesday]:—In the evening with C. Lamb; whist and his usual party; cards and nothing but cards."

On the 14th Hazlitt gave his first lecture at the Russell Institution, on the History of English Philosophy. Robinson records that he read very fast without looking at his audience. On the 15th Hazlitt was at Lamb's in depression about his lectures, which he meditated giving up.

The Hazlitts had just settled in town, having moved to 19 York Street, Westminster, where Milton once lived. It was there that the projected christening party for young William was held, as described by Benjamin Robert Haydon, the painter, who must now be added to the list of Lamb's friends. "In the midst of Hazlitt's weaknesses, his parental affections were beautiful. He had one boy. He loved him. He doated on him. He told me one night this boy was to be christened. 'Will ye come on Friday?' 'Certainly,' said I. His eye glistened. Friday came, but as I knew all parties I lunched heartily first and was there punctually at four. Hazlitt then

lived in Milton's house, Westminster, next door to Bentham. At four I came, but he was out. I walked up and found his wife ill by the fire in a bed gown—nothing ready for guests, and everything wearing the appearance of neglect and indifference. I said, 'Where is Hazlitt?' 'Oh dear, William has gone to look for a parson.' 'A parson; why, has he not thought of that before?' 'No, he didn't.' 'I'll go and look for him,' said I, and out I went into the park through Queen's Square and met Hazlitt in a rage coming home. 'Have ye got a parson?' 'No, sir,' said he, 'these fellows are all out.' 'What will ye do?' 'Nothing.' So in we walked, Hazlitt growling at all the parsons and the church.

"When we came in we sat down—nobody was come;—no table laid;—no appearance of dinner. On my life there is nothing so heartless as going out to dinner and finding no dinner ready. I sat down; the company began to drop in—Charles Lamb and his poor sister—all sorts of odd, clever people. Still no dinner. At last came in a maid who laid a cloth and put down knives and forks in a heap. Then followed a dish of potatoes, cold, waxy and yellow. Then came a great bit of beef with a bone like a battering-ram toppling on all its corners. Neither Hazlitt nor Lamb seemed at all disturbed, but set to work helping each other; while the boy, half clean and obstinate, kept squalling to put his fingers into the gravy. Even Lamb's wit and Hazlitt's disquisitions, in a large room, wainscotted and ancient, where Milton had meditated, could not reconcile me to such violation of all the decencies of life."

In the year 1812 Haydon was twenty-six, and was fairly well known as a painter by virtue of his "Dentatus." He had, however, begun his quarrel with the Academy, partly because they preferred George Dawe to himself as an Associate in 1809, and partly because in the same year they had hung "Dentatus" badly. He had, however, good friends in Lord Mulgrave, Wilkie and Sir George Beaumont, and although his persistent wrong-headedness had already asserted itself he seemed to be on the edge of a great career. Of Lamb we have some pleasant glimpses in his journals; but the two men can never have been very intimate.

Writing of Lamb and Haydon in *Notes and Queries* in 1859, Mr. James Elmer said, "The last few times I saw my two friends together were the private view of the above-laureated picture

["Christ's Entry into Jerusalem," upon which Lamb wrote some verses both in English and Latin]; at the *Champion* office with Mr. John Scott [of whom we see much in Haydon's *Diary*, and who afterwards edited the *London Magazine*]; and once or twice in evening parties at the painter's house, Lisson Grove, North. Lamb and Haydon were often like boys, so boisterous in their mirth and hilarity." One of their hilarious evenings is described by Haydon in a later chapter.

To return to Hazlitt, whose association with Lamb was now at its closest, I might quote at this point the description by Talfourd, which although it belongs to a slightly later period is yet opportune: "His countenance was then handsome, but marked by a painful expression; his black hair, which had curled stiffly over his temples, had scarcely received its first tints of grey; his gait was awkward; his dress was neglected; and, in the company of strangers, his bashfulness was almost painful—but when, in the society of Lamb and one or two others, he talked on his favourite themes of old English books, or old Italian pictures, no one's conversation could be more delightful. The poets, from intercourse with whom he had drawn so much of his taste, and who had contributed to shed the noble infection of beauty through his reasoning faculties, had scarcely the opportunity of appreciating their progress."

Crabb Robinson resumes:—

"January 17th, 1812:—At 10 went to Barron Field's [at No. 4 Hare Court Temple]. C. Lamb, and Leigh Hunt and Mrs. Hills there. Lamb and Hunt, I found, had had a contest about Coleridge. H. had spoken of him as a bad writer, L. as of the first man he ever knew. The dispute was revived by me, but nothing remarkable was said. C. L., who soon became tipsy, in his droll extravagant way abused every one who denied the transcendency, while H. dryly denied the excellency of his writings and expressed his regret that he did not know him personally. H. took L.'s speeches in good part, evidently by his manner showed his respect for his talents, while C. L. to make his freedom endurable praised Hunt's remarks on Fuseli (a praise H. seemed to relish). I spoke about Hazlitt's lectures in terms of great praise, but C. L. would not join me, and I fear I did not succeed in my object. I left C. L. getting very drunk, and I understand the party remained up till late. I staid only till 12.

"January 21st, 1812:—Hazlitt read half his first lecture at B. Montagu's last night. He was to read the whole, but abruptly broke off and would not be persuaded to read the remainder. Lamb and other friends were there." On the 21st Hazlitt gave the lecture with an improved delivery.

"February 5th, 1812:—A wet walk to Captain Burney's; a mere card party as usual. . . . Miss Lamb pointed out to me a passage in the *Quarterly Review* against her brother, which I think in brutality surpasses anything even in the *Edinburgh Review*." This was Gifford's allusion to Lamb's comments on John Ford's play, in the *Dramatic Specimens*, as "the blasphemies of a maniac." Gifford afterwards made an effort to explain it away, but it was impossible to undo the pain caused by such a blunder.[1]

"February 26th, 1812:—Call . . . on C. Lamb for a short time; poor C. L. having been with me, saying his sister was again ill but he wished me to come as usual. I found the usual party at whist, but grave.

"March 16th, 1812:—To Charles Lamb, with whom were Barron Field, Leigh Hunt, and Barnes. The latter with a somewhat *feist* appearance, has a good countenance, and is a man who, I dare say, will make his way in the world. He has talents and activity, and inducements to activity. He has obtained high honours at Cambridge, and is now a candidate for a fellowship. He reports for Walter." This was Thomas Barnes, a schoolfellow of Leigh Hunt at Christ's Hospital, who, introduced to the *Times* as a reporter by Barron Field, became its first great editor in 1817. Barnes was a man of notable clearness of mind and sarcastic speech. Leigh Hunt, to whose *Reflector* and *Examiner* he contributed, said of him that "he might have made himself a name in wit in literature, had he cared much for anything beyond his glass of wine and his Fielding." Barnes, who made the *Times* a power, was succeeded by John Delane.

Lamb tells us nothing of Barnes, but Talfourd gives us a glimpse of the two men in company: "I well remember him, late one evening, in the year 1816, when only two or three friends remained with Lamb and his sister, long after 'we had heard the chimes at midnight,' holding inveterate but delighted

[1] See Vol. I. of my edition of Lamb's *Works*, pages 447, 448.

controversy with Lamb, respecting the tragic power of Dante as compared with that of Shakspeare. Dante was scarcely known to Lamb; for he was unable to read the original, and Cary's noble translation was not then known to him; and Barnes aspired to the glory of affording him a glimpse of a kindred greatness in the mighty Italian with that which he had conceived incapable of human rivalry. The face of the advocate of Dante, heavy when in repose, grew bright with earnest admiration as he quoted images, sentiments, dialogues, against Lamb, who had taken his own immortal stand on Lear, and urged the supremacy of the child-changed father against all the possible Ugolinos of the world. Some reference having been made by Lamb to his own exposition of Lear, which had been recently published in a magazine, edited by Leigh Hunt, under the title of the *Reflector*, touched another and a tenderer string of feeling, turned a little the course of his enthusiasm the more to inflame it, and brought out a burst of affectionate admiration for his friend, then scarcely known to the world, which was the more striking for its contrast with his usually sedate demeanour. I think I see him now, leaning forward upon the little table on which the candles were just expiring in their sockets, his fists clenched, his eyes flashing, and his face bathed in perspiration, exclaiming to Lamb, 'And do I not know, my boy, that you have written about Shakspeare, and Shakspeare's own Lear, finer than any one ever did in the world, and won't I let the world know it?'"[1]

To return to Robinson's entry for March 16th. He continues, "Charles Lamb was in his best humour—very good-humoured, but at the same time solid. I never heard him talk to greater advantage. He wrote last week in the *Examiner* some capital lines, 'The Triumph of the Whale,' and this occasioned the con-

[1] One joke that is usually given to Lamb is credited, says Cowden Clarke, also to Barnes: the reply to the tiresomely maternal lady who asked how he liked babies—"Boiled, ma'am."

The story is in the same manner as that excellent one which tells how Lamb put an end to a fellow guest's inquiries as to his acquaintance with persons of note: "Do you know So-and-so? Do you know thus-and-thus?" At last, "Do you know Miss ——?" "No, madam, I do not; but damn her at a venture." The kindest and most patient endurer of certain types of dulness (so long as it was genuine or not pretentious), Lamb seems to have been unable to suffer a fool.

versation to take more of a political turn than is usual with Lamb. Leigh Hunt is an enthusiast, very well-intentioned, and I believe prepared for the worst. He said, pleasantly enough, 'No one can accuse me of not writing a libel. Everything is a libel, as the law is now declared, and our security lies only in their shame.' He talked on the theatre, and showed on such points great superiority over the others."

I print here Lamb's verses on the Prince of Wales—"The Triumph of the Whale"—as an example of his daring as a political satirist.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE WHALE

Io! Pæan! Io! sing
To the finny people's King.
Not a mightier whale than this
In the vast Atlantic is;
Not a fatter fish than he
Flounders round the Polar sea.
See his blubbers—at his gills
What a world of drink he swills,
From his trunk, as from a spout,
Which next moment he pours out.
Such his person—next declare,
Muse, who his companions are.—
Every fish of generous kind
Scuds aside, or slinks behind;
But about his presence keep
All the Monsters of the Deep;
Mermaids, with their tails and singing
His delighted fancy stinging;
Crooked Dolphins, they surround him,
Dog-like Seals, they fawn around him.
Following hard, the progress mark
Of the intolerant salt sea shark.
For his solace and relief,
Flat fish are his courtiers chief.
Last and lowest in his train,
Ink-fish (libellers of the main)
Their black liquor shed in spite:
(Such on earth the things *that write*).
In his stomach, some do say,
No good thing can ever stay.
Had it been the fortune of it
To have swallowed that old Prophet,
Three days there he'd not have dwell'd,
But in one have been expell'd.
Hapless mariners are they,
Who beguil'd (as seamen say),

Deeming him some rock or island,
Footing sure, safe spot, and dry land,
Anchor in his scaly rind;
Soon the difference they find;
Sudden plumb, he sinks beneath them;
Does to ruthless waves bequeath them.

Name or title what has he?
Is he Regent of the Sea?
From this difficulty free us,
Buffon, Banks or sage Linnæus.
With his wondrous attributes
Say what appellation suits.
By his bulk, and by his size,
By his oily qualities,
This (or else my eyesight fails),
This should be the PRINCE OF WHALES.

The lines were printed in the *Examiner*, Leigh Hunt's paper, on March 15th, a week earlier than Leigh Hunt's famous article on the Prince, styling him "a corpulent man of fifty . . . a violator of his vow, a libertine over head and ears in disgrace, a despiser of domesticities, a companion of gamblers and demireps. . . ." No notice was taken of Lamb's couplets, but Hunt's unequivocal prose was destined to be too much for the royal party. Robinson records, under March 30th: "Stepped late to Barron Field's chambers; Barnes, Lamb, J. Collier. We talked about Hunt, whose indiscreet article against the Prince even his friends censure. L. and B. disputed about Wordsworth." The Hunts were prosecuted in due course; the trial being held in December of 1812. Brougham defended, but a sentence of two years' imprisonment was passed. To this, however, we shall come later.

"April 4th, 1812:—Took tea with C. Lamb, where were Kenney and his bride, the late Mrs. Holcroft. C. Lamb had but just heard of the marriage . . . and was infinitely droll. He said [to Mrs. Kenney] he expected his presents back again, and asked 'That is all that has passed between us, is it not?' The bride was in her usual good spirits, and K. has all the appearance of an amiable, but at the same time, a nervous, feeble-bodied man." James Kenney was at this time thirty-two. His farce "Turn Him Out" had just been produced, and his "Love, Law and Physic," which gave Liston the admirable part of Lubin Log, was being written. We shall meet the Kenneys again in 1822.

"May 9th, 1812:—A call on C. Lamb; found Miss Lamb

with him, to my great satisfaction. I chatted a short time. He is of opinion that any attempt to bring Wordsworth [who was then in London] and Coleridge together must prove ineffectual. Perhaps he thinks it mischievous. He thinks W. cold. It may be so: healthful coolness is preferable to the heat of disease. He thinks W.'s arrival in London a most unhappy thing for C. who apprehends his presence at Sir G. Beaumont's will operate to his disadvantage (in his lectures). . . . Borrowed of L. his 'Mr. H.' which in the evening I read at Mrs. Barbauld's to Mrs. and Miss Aikin and Miss Kinder. They all appeared to enjoy it very much." Sir George Beaumont, the painter, was Wordsworth's friend and a patron of Coleridge. Mrs. Anne Letitia Barbauld, the author of *Hymns in Prose*, was then an old lady of sixty-nine, living at Stoke Newington with her brother, Dr. John Aikin, who had collaborated with her in *Evenings at Home*, and with his family, of whom Lucy Aikin, the writer, was the best known.

The reference to Wordsworth and Coleridge requires some explanation, and I cannot do better than give it in the words of the late Mr. Dykes Campbell. "In October [1810] Basil Montagu, with his wife and her little daughter (Anne Skepper, afterwards Mrs. B. W. Procter), called at Greta Hall on his way south from a tour in Scotland. There was a vacant place in the chaise, and this Coleridge took, the party arriving at Montagu's residence (55 Frith Street, Soho) on the 26th October. Coleridge was to have been a guest there for an indefinite period, but within a few days the visit came to an abrupt and painful end. When the chaise halted at Allen Bank, and Wordsworth learnt that Coleridge was to become an inmate of the Montagu household, he expressed to Montagu, in confidence, a fear that some of Coleridge's ways would prove inconvenient in a well-ordered town establishment. This he did with the kindest motives, and no doubt in the kindest terms, thinking that prevention was better than cure—if Coleridge and Montagu became housemates they would quarrel, which would be a misfortune for both, especially for Coleridge.

"Three days after arrival in London, Montagu informed Coleridge that he had been commissioned by Wordsworth to say to him that certain of his (Coleridge's) habits had made him an intolerable guest at Allen Bank, and that he (Wordsworth) had

'no hope for him.' Unfortunately Coleridge believed this monstrous story, and, soon after, he left Montagu's roof, taking refuge with the Morgans, then living at Hammersmith. He was heart-broken that Wordsworth could have said such things of him, much more that he could have commissioned Montagu to repeat them. But for a long time he said nothing.

"The breach between the two poets remained open until May, 1812, when a reconciliation was effected by the good offices of Crabb Robinson. It turned out, of course, that Wordsworth had neither used the wounding (even coarse) language attributed to him with regard to Coleridge's personal habits, nor said *anything* in the *spirit* attributed to him; nor commissioned Montagu to repeat to Coleridge anything whatever—very much to the contrary. He confessed to having said (or implied) to Montagu that he had 'little or no hope' of Coleridge, and expressed deep regret that he had said anything at all to so indiscreet a man as Montagu. Letters declared to be 'mutually satisfactory' were exchanged by the two poets, and the troubled air was stilled; but each was conscious that it was also darkened, and that in their friendship there could never be 'glad confident morning again.'"

A long letter from Coleridge to Lamb on this subject is printed in Mr. E. H. Coleridge's edition of Coleridge's letters —one of the very few letters from Coleridge to Lamb that have been preserved.

"May 11th, 1812:—I went again to Coleridge, where I found the Lambs. I had just heard of what had taken place about an hour and half before, the assassination of Mr. Perceval. This news shocked C. exceedingly. . . . C. L. was apparently affected, but could not help mingling with humour his real concern at the event, for he talked of loving his Regent.

"June 6th, 1812:—The Colliers, Wordsworths and the Lambs joined to tea and supper at A. Robinson's. . . . C. Lamb was very pleasant and comfortable." A. Robinson was Anthony Robinson, the Unitarian, a great friend, but no relative, of Crabb Robinson. He was then living in Hatton Garden. Anthony Robinson's company would some years earlier have meant more to Lamb than at this time, for he had been intimate with Priestley.

On the same day, June 6th, Robinson records sending Lamb a copy of Wordsworth's "Peter Bell" in manuscript, and being

much disappointed by Lamb's verdict. "He complains of the slowness of the narrative. . . . He says Wordsworth has great thoughts, but has left them out here."

In the month of August in this year Charles Lamb became a landed proprietor. He mentions the circumstances in the essay "My First Play," where, writing of his godfather, Francis Fielde, whom we met in Chapter I., he says, "He is dead—and thus much I thought due to his memory, both for my first orders (little wondrous talismans!—slight keys, and insignificant to outward sight, but opening to me more than Arabian paradises!) and moreover, that by his testamentary beneficence I came into possession of the only landed property which I could ever call my own—situate near the road-way village of pleasant Puckeridge, in Hertfordshire. When I journeyed down to take possession, and planted foot on my own ground, the stately habits of the donor descended upon me, and I strode (shall I confess the vanity?) with larger paces over my allotment of three quarters of an acre, with its commodious mansion in the midst, with the feeling of an English freeholder that all betwixt sky and centre was my own."

Francis Fielde left the property to his wife, who conveyed it to Charles Lamb by indentures of lease and release, dated August 20th and 21st, 1812. It is a cottage and garden situated at West Hill Green, in the parish of Buntingford, in Hertfordshire, about two and a half miles from Puckeridge. Mr. Greg, the present owner, has placed a tablet on the wall of the cottage, stating that Charles Lamb once owned it. The little place can have changed hardly at all since Francis Fielde's godson made the momentous journey to see his first and last freehold. Lamb's tenant was a Mr. Sargus, and when Lamb sold the property in 1815 for fifty pounds (Mr. Fielde had given twenty for it), he remitted the last quarter's rent as a set-off against repairs. Mr. Greg (whose ancestor Lamb called Grig) believes that the name of the cottage, Button Snap, was given to it by Lamb.

This may be so. I have quite lately heard of an old man who claimed to be related to a cousin of Charles Lamb named Eliza Button, and who was the possessor of two scrap-books in each of which Lamb had written an acrostic, one being on the name Button. It occurs to me that the odd title of Lamb's cottage, Button Snap, may have some family connection.

In this year was born Charles Dickens.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### 1813

Leigh Hunt in Prison—His Praises of Lamb—Lamb's "Favourite Child"—The "Confessions of a Drunkard"—Lamb and Strong Drink—Crabb Robinson's *Diary* Again.

THE year 1813 is largely a blank. No letter can be ascribed to it with certainty, and Robinson has little to tell. Lamb seems to have published only the "Confessions of a Drunkard," some scraps of "Table Talk" for Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, and his "Recollections of Christ's Hospital" in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Perhaps the most interesting event of the year in his circle was the production, at Drury Lane, on January 23rd, of Coleridge's tragedy "Remorse," with Lamb's fine prologue "spoken by Mr. Carr." Lamb tells us nothing of the performance, nor does Robinson mention him as being present. The prologue, by the way, was only adapted to suit Coleridge's purpose. It had originally been written as one of the addresses to be spoken at the reopening of Drury Lane after the fire. Lamb, like all the other competing poets, was unsuccessful, but he escaped the attention of the authors of *Rejected Addresses*.

On February 3rd the Hunts were sentenced each to two years' imprisonment in separate gaols. Leigh Hunt, accompanied by Barron Field, drove from the court to the Surrey Gaol in Horsemonger Lane, where he was to remain until February 3rd, 1815. After some weeks he was moved into the infirmary, where he furnished a room (which Lamb declared had no counterpart except in a fairy tale), cultivated a garden, pursued his literary vocations, and had the company of his family. In the *Examiner*, July 18th, 1824, in a series of charming papers called "The Wishing Cap," Hunt, speaking of his visitors during his imprisonment, says: "But what return can I make to the

L.s [Lambs], who came to comfort me in all weathers, hail or sunshine, in day-light or in darkness, even in the dreadful frost and snow of the beginning of 1814? I am always afraid of talking about them, lest my tropical temperament should seem to render me too florid." He mentions these visits also in the rhyming epistle to Lamb which he published in the *Examiner* and afterwards in *Foliage*, 1818:—

O thou, whom old Homer would call, were he living,
Home-lover, thought-feeder, abundant-joke-giving;
Whose charity springs from deep-knowledge, nor swerves
Into mere self-reflections, or scornful reserves;
In short, who wert made for two centuries ago,
When Shakespeare drew men, and to write was to know;—

You'll guess why I can't see the snow-covered streets,
Without thinking of you and your visiting feats,
When you call to remembrance how you and one more,
When I wanted it most, used to knock at my door;
For when the sad winds told us rain would come down,
Or snow upon snow fairly clogged up the town,
And dun yellow fogs brooded over its white,
So that scarcely a being was seen towards night,
Then, then said the lady yclept near and dear,
"Now, mind what I tell you—the L[amb]s will be here."

So I poked up the flame, and she got out the tea,
And down we both sat, as prepared as could be;
And there, sure as fate, came the knock of you two,
Then the lanthorn, the laugh, and the "Well, how d'ye do?"

Then your palm tow'rds the fire, and your face turned to me,
And shawls and great-coats being—where they should be,—
And due "never saws" being paid to the weather,
We cherished our knees, and sat sipping together,
And leaving the world to the fogs and the fighters,
Discussed the pretensions of all sorts of writers;
Of Shakespeare's coevals, all spirits divine;
Of Chapman, whose Homer's a fine rough old wine;
Of Marvel, wit, patriot, and poet who knew
How to give, both at once, Charles and Cromwell their due;
Of Spenser, who wraps you, wherever you are,
In a bow'r of seclusion beneath a sweet star;
Of Richardson, too, who afflicts us so long,
We begin to suspect him of nerves over-strong;
In short, of all those who give full-measur'd page,
Not forgetting Sir Thomas, my ancestor sage,
Who delighted (so happy were all his digestions)
In puzzling his head with impossible questions.[1]

[1] The allusion to Sir Thomas Browne as an ancestor is explained by the fact that Leigh Hunt signed the series of epistles of which this is one, Harry Brown.

It was Leigh Hunt's special gift to find excellence in good men and good books. As a constructive critic he may not have been of the first rank, but as an understanding appreciator, a finger-post to beauty, he has had no superior. He wrote of Lamb in many places and always well. In the *Indicator*, in 1821: "If we were to make a summary of Mr. Lamb's merits as a writer, we should say that there was not a deeper or more charitable observer existing. He has none of the abhorrent self-loves that belong to lesser understandings. He takes little, and grants much. He sees through all the causes or circumstances that modify the human character; and while he likes from sympathy, he dislikes with generosity and sincerity, and differs rather than pretends to be better. If there is anything indeed that looks like affectation in the most sincere and unaffected temper of his writings, it arises partly from the excess of his sympathy with his species, and partly from a wish to make the best of all which they do or suffer; and it leads him into the only inconsistency that we can trace to him. As an admirer for instance of Christianity, and perhaps as a Christian himself in the truest sense of the word, he sympathizes exceedingly with patience and gentleness and the forgiveness of wrongs. This also appears to be his own temper; but then he seems fearful lest this should be construed into a weakness instead of a strength; and so from turning his sympathy to another side of human nature, he palliates some of the most vehement and doubtful passions, and has a good word to say now and then in behalf of revenge itself. The consequence of this exceeding wish to make the best of things as they are (we do not speak politically, but philosophically), is, that his writings tend rather to prepare others for doing good wisely, than to help the progress of the species themselves. It is this sympathy also, which tends to give his criticism a more prominent effect, than his poetry. He seems to think that poetry as well as prose has done enough, when it reconciles men to each other as they are; and that after Shakespeare and others, it is useless to say much on this subject; so that he deals little in the abstractions of fancy and imagination. He desires no better Arcadia than Fleet-street; or at least pretends as much, for fear of not finding it."

Again, in the *London Journal*, in 1835, just after Lamb's death: "Mr. Lamb was a humanist, in the most universal sense

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LEIGH HUNT (AGED 44)

FROM THE PORTRAIT BY J. HAYTER. ENGRAVED BY HENRY MEYER

of the term. His imagination was not great, and he also wanted sufficient vigour of impulse to render his poetry as good as his prose; but, as a prose-writer, and within the wide circuit of humanity, no man ever took a more complete range than he. He had felt, thought, and suffered so much, that he literally had intolerance for nothing, and never seemed to have it, but when he supposed the sympathies of men, who might have known better, to be imperfect. He was a wit and an observer of the first order, as far as the world around him was concerned, and society in its existing state; for as to anything theoretical or transcendental, no man ever had less care for it, or less power. To take him out of habit and convention, however tolerant he was to those who could speculate beyond them, was to put him into an exhausted receiver, or to send him naked, shivering, and driven to shatters, through the regions of space and time. *He was only at his ease in the old arms of humanity;* and she loved and comforted him like one of her wisest, though weakest children. His life had experienced great and peculiar sorrows; but he kept up a balance between those and his consolations, by the goodness of his heart, and the ever-willing sociality of his humour; though, now and then, as if he would cram into one moment the spleen of years, he would throw out a startling and morbid subject for reflection, perhaps in no better shape than a pun; for he was a great punster. It was a levity that relieved the gravity of his thoughts, and kept them from falling too heavily earthwards."

It was Leigh Hunt's fate never as a writer to be quite good enough; with Hazlitt on one side and Lamb on the other, there was no actual need for much of his work. But such a sentence as that which I have thrown into italics is sufficient indication that within his limits, on his own ground, he could say exquisite things, full of profound discernment and sympathy. Not until Walter Pater's essay in 1889, from which I quote elsewhere in this work, was Lamb so delicately and tenderly treated again.

Lamb, I think, may have felt that he was in some sort himself to blame for Leigh Hunt's imprisonment, his own verses, "The Triumph of the Whale," although unnoticed officially, having no doubt aggravated the *Examiner's* obnoxiousness among the Prince's friends. Hence, perhaps, a part of his assiduity in visiting the prisoner, for Leigh Hunt was not at that time, if ever, a

very intimate friend, comparable with Coleridge or Manning. A further inducement to seek the Surrey gaol was Thornton Hunt, Leigh Hunt's little four-year-old boy, to whom he addressed the pretty verses "To T. L. H.," which were printed in the *Examiner* for January 1st, 1815. In introducing the poem Hunt referred to the author as one to whom he owed "some of the lightest hours of his captivity," and to the subject of it as "his continual solace."

> Guileless traitor, rebel mild,
> Convict unconscious, culprit-child!
> Gates that close with iron roar
> Have been to thee thy nursery door;
> Chains that chink in cheerless cells
> Have been thy rattles and thy bells;
> Walls contrived for giant sin
> Have hemmed thy faultless weakness in. . . .
>
> But the clouds, that overcast
> Thy young morning, may not last.
> Soon shall arrive the rescuing hour,
> That yields thee up to Nature's power.
> Nature, that so late doth greet thee,
> Shall in o'er-flowing measure meet thee.
> She shall recompense with cost
> For every lesson thou hast lost.
> Then wandering up thy sire's lov'd hill,[1]
> Thou shalt take thy airy fill
> Of health and pastime. *Birds shall sing*
> *For thy delight each May morning.* . . .
>
> So shall be thy days beguil'd,
> THORNTON HUNT, my favourite child.

Crabb Robinson's first entry for 1813 runs thus: "Jan. 14th:—Called at Lamb's, where I found the Hazlitts, &c., and chatted pleasantly enough with them.

"April 29th, 1813. Thursday:—I spent the evening, which I have not done for a long time before, at C. Lamb's; at whist as usual. Chat with Hazlitt, who finds himself made comfortable by a situation which furnishes him with the necessaries of life, keeps his best faculties not employed but awake, and I do not think it is much to be feared that his faculties will therefore decline; he has a most powerful intellect and needs only encouragement to manifest this to the world by a work which could not be overlooked." Hazlitt's appointment was that of parlia-

[1] Hampstead.

mentary reporter to the *Chronicle*, in acquiring which Lamb seems to have been instrumental, as we know from a letter to John Dyer Collier on the subject. Hazlitt did not long retain the post, disagreeing with James Perry, the editor, in the autumn of the following year. Robinson describes the quarrel.

The next entry requires serious attention. "April 29th, 1813: —Read lately C. Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard*, a very striking composition and calculated to do good generally, though it will hardly be thought so near a correct representation of a fact as it really is. It is sometimes painfully eloquent."

The essay—which was printed in the *Philanthropist*, No. IX., in 1813, reprinted in Basil Montagu's *Some Enquiries into the Effects of Fermented Liquors*, in 1814; again in the *London Magazine* for August, 1822; and lastly in the second edition of the *Last Essays of Elia*, after Lamb's death—is a remarkable document, and whether imaginary or true, it must always have painful associations. Robinson's comment upon it makes the consideration of the subject necessary; but it would be well first to have a portion of the "Confessions" before us. I quote, not from the *Philanthropist*, where editorial changes seem to have been imposed, but from the essay as it was reprinted by Lamb's own wish in the *London Magazine* in 1822.

"Begin a reformation, and custom will make it easy. But what if the beginning be dreadful, the first steps not like climbing a mountain but going through fire? what if the whole system must undergo a change violent as that which we conceive of the mutation of form in some insects? what if a process comparable to flaying alive be to be gone through? is the weakness that sinks under such struggles to be confounded with the pertinacity which clings to other vices, which have induced no constitutional necessity, no engagement of the whole victim, body and soul?

"I have known one in that state, when he has tried to abstain but for one evening,—though the poisonous potion had long ceased to bring back its first enchantments, though he was sure it would rather deepen his gloom than brighten it,—in the violence of the struggle, and the necessity he has felt of getting rid of the present sensation at any rate, I have known him to scream out, to cry aloud, for the anguish and pain of the strife within him.

"Why should I hesitate to declare, that the man of whom I speak is myself? I have no puling apology to make to mankind. I see them all in one way or another deviating from the pure reason. It is to my own nature alone I am accountable for the woe that I have brought upon it.

"I believe that there are constitutions, robust heads and iron insides, whom scarce any excesses can hurt; whom brandy (I have seen them drink it like wine), at all events whom wine, taken in ever so plentiful measure, can do no worse injury to than just to muddle their faculties, perhaps never very pellucid. On them this discourse is wasted. They would but laugh at a weak brother, who, trying his strength with them, and coming off foiled from the contest, would fain persuade them that such agonistic exercises are dangerous. It is to a very different description of persons I speak. It is to the weak, the nervous; to those who feel the want of some artificial aid to raise their spirits in society to what is no more than the ordinary pitch of all around them without it. This is the secret of our drinking. Such must fly the convivial board in the first instance, if they do not mean to sell themselves for term of life.

"Twelve years ago I had completed my six and twentieth year. I had lived from the period of leaving school to that time pretty much in solitude. My companions were chiefly books, or at most one or two living ones of my own book-loving and sober stamp. I rose early, went to bed betimes, and the faculties which God had given me, I have reason to think, did not rust in me unused.

"About that time I fell in with some companions of a different order. They were men of boisterous spirits, sitters up a-nights, disputants, drunken; yet seemed to have something noble about them. We dealt about the wit, or what passes for it after midnight, jovially. Of the quality called fancy I certainly possessed a larger share than my companions. Encouraged by their applause, I set up for a profest joker! I, who of all men am least fitted for such an occupation, having, in addition to the greatest difficulty which I experience at all times of finding words to express my meaning, a natural nervous impediment in my speech!

"Reader, if you are gifted with nerves like mine, aspire to any character but that of a wit. When you find a tickling relish upon your tongue disposing you to that sort of conversation,

especially if you find a preternatural flow of ideas setting in upon you at the sight of a bottle and fresh glasses, avoid giving way to it as you would fly your greatest destruction. If you cannot crush the power of fancy, or that within you which you mistake for such, divert it, give it some other play. Write an essay, pen a character or description,—but not as I do now, with tears trickling down your cheeks.

"To be an object of compassion to friends, of derision to foes; to be suspected by strangers, stared at by fools; to be esteemed dull when you cannot be witty, to be applauded for witty when you know that you have been dull; to be called upon for the extemporaneous exercise of that faculty which no premeditation can give; to be spurred on to efforts which end in contempt; to be set on to provoke mirth which procures the procurer hatred; to give pleasure and be paid with squinting malice; to swallow draughts of life-destroying wine which are to be distilled into airy breath to tickle vain auditors; to mortgage miserable morrows for nights of madness; to waste whole seas of time upon those who pay it back in little inconsiderable drops of grudging applause,—are the wages of buffoonery and death.

"Time, which has a sure stroke at dissolving all connexions which have no solider fastening than this liquid cement, more kind to me than my own taste or penetration, at length opened my eyes to the supposed qualities of my first friends. No trace of them is left but in the vices which they introduced, and the habits they infixed. In them my friends survive still, and exercise ample retribution for any supposed infidelity that I may have been guilty of towards them.

"My next more immediate companions were and are persons of such intrinsic and felt worth, that though accidentally their acquaintance has proved pernicious to me, I do not know that if the thing were to do over again, I should have the courage to eschew the mischief at the price of forfeiting the benefit. I came to them reeking from the steams of my late over-heated notions of companionship; and the slightest fuel which they unconsciously afforded, was sufficient to feed my old fires into a propensity.

"They were no drinkers, but, one from professional habits, and another from a custom derived from his father, smoked tobacco. The devil could not have devised a more subtle trap to re-take a backsliding penitent. The transition, from gulping down draughts

of liquid fire to puffing out innocuous blasts of dry smoke, was so like cheating him. But he is too hard for us when we hope to commute. He beats us at barter; and when we think to set off a new failing against an old infirmity, 'tis odds but he puts the trick upon us of two for one. That (comparatively) white devil of tobacco brought with him in the end seven worse than himself. . . .

"I should repel my readers, from a mere incapacity of believing me, were I to tell them what tobacco has been to me, the drudging service which I have paid, the slavery which I have vowed to it. How, when I have resolved to quit it, a feeling as of ingratitude has started up; how it has put on personal claims and made the demands of a friend upon me. How the reading of it casually in a book, as where Adams takes his whiff in the chimney-corner of some inn in Joseph Andrews, or Piscator in the Complete Angler breaks his fast upon a morning pipe in that delicate room *Piscatoribus Sacrum*, has in a moment broken down the resistance of weeks. How a pipe was ever in my midnight path before me, till the vision forced me to realize it,—how then its ascending vapours curled, its fragrance lulled, and the thousand delicious ministerings conversant about it, employing every faculty, extracted the sense of pain. How from illuminating it came to darken, from a quick solace it turned to a negative relief, thence to a restlessness and dissatisfaction, thence to a positive misery. How, even now, when the whole secret stands confessed in all its dreadful truth before me, I feel myself linked to it beyond the power of revocation. Bone of my bone—— . . .

"The waters have gone over me. But out of the black depths, could I be heard, I would cry out to all those who have but set a foot in the perilous flood. Could the youth, to whom the flavor of his first wine is delicious as the opening scenes of life, or the entering upon some newly discovered paradise, look into my desolation, and be made to understand what a dreary thing it is when a man shall feel himself going down a precipice with open eyes and a passive will,—to see his destruction, and have no power to stop it, and yet to feel it all the way emanating from himself; to perceive all goodness emptied out of him, and yet not to be able to forget a time when it was otherwise; to bear about the piteous spectacle of his own self-ruins:—could he see my fevered eye, feverish with last night's drinking, and feverishly looking for

this night's repetition of the folly; could he feel the body of the death out of which I cry hourly with feebler and feebler outcry to be delivered,—it were enough to make him dash the sparkling beverage to the earth in all the pride of its mantling temptation; to make him clasp his teeth,

and not undo 'em
To suffer WET DAMNATION to run through 'em. . . .

"*Recovering!*—O if a wish could transport me back to those days of youth, when a draught from the next clear spring could slake any heats which summer suns and youthful exercise had power to stir up in the blood, how gladly would I return to thee, pure element, the drink of children, and of child-like holy hermit. In my dreams I can sometimes fancy thy cool refreshment purling over my burning tongue. But my waking stomach rejects it. That which refreshes innocence, only makes me sick and faint. . . .

"Behold me then, in the robust period of life, reduced to imbecility and decay. Hear me count my gains, and the profits which I have derived from the midnight cup.

"Twelve years ago I was possessed of a healthy frame of mind and body. I was never strong, but I think my constitution (for a weak one) was as happily exempt from the tendency to any malady as it was possible to be. I scarce knew what it was to ail any thing. Now, except when I am losing myself in a sea of drink, I am never free from those uneasy sensations in head and stomach, which are so much worse to bear than any definite pains or aches.

"At that time I was seldom in bed after six in the morning, summer and winter. I awoke refreshed, and seldom without some merry thoughts in my head, or some piece of a song to welcome the new-born day. Now, the first feeling which besets me, after stretching out the hours of recumbence to their last possible extent, is a forecast of the wearisome day that lies before me, with a secret wish that I could have lain on still, or never awaked.

"Life itself, my waking life, has much of the confusion, the trouble, and obscure perplexity, of an ill dream. In the daytime I stumble upon dark mountains. . . ."

I have omitted some portions, but the most poignant passages are there. The reason for reprinting the "Confessions" in 1822 was twofold: Lamb was in France and unable to supply a new

essay, and a writer in the *Quarterly* had gone out of his way, in the number for April, 1822, to pronounce the "Confessions" (as printed in Montagu's book) genuine. In the *London Magazine* the essay was therefore accompanied by a note from Lamb's pen. "We have been induced, in the first instance, to re-print a Thing, which he [Elia] put forth in a friend's volume some years since, entitled the Confessions of a Drunkard, seeing that Messieurs the Quarterly Reviewers have chosen to embellish their last dry pages with fruitful quotations therefrom; adding, from their peculiar brains, the gratuitous affirmation, that they have reason to believe that the describer (in his delineations of a drunkard forsooth!) partly sate for his own picture. The truth is, that our friend had been reading among the Essays of a contemporary, who has perversely been confounded with him,[1] a paper in which *Edax* (or the *Great Eater*) humorously complaineth of an inordinate appetite; and it struck him, that a better paper—of deeper interest, and wider usefulness—might be made out of the imagined experiences of a *Great Drinker*. Accordingly he set to work, and with that mock fervor, and counterfeit earnestness, with which he is too apt to over-realise his descriptions, has given us—a frightful picture indeed—but no more resembling the man *Elia*, than the fictitious *Edax* may be supposed to identify itself with Mr. L., its author. It is indeed a compound extracted out of his long observations of the effects of drinking upon all the world about him; and this accumulated mass of misery he hath centered (as the custom is with judicious essayists) in a single figure. We deny not that a portion of his own experiences may have passed into the picture, (as who, that is not a washy fellow, but must at some times have felt the after-operation of a too generous cup?)—but then how heightened! how exaggerated! —how little within the sense of the Review, where a part, in their slanderous usage, must be understood to stand for the whole!— but it is useless to expostulate with this Quarterly slime, brood of Nilus, watery heads with hearts of jelly, spawned under the sign of Aquarius, incapable of Bacchus, and therefore cold, washy, spiteful, bloodless.——Elia shall string them up one day, and show their colours—or rather how colourless and vapid the whole fry—when he putteth forth his long promised, but unaccountably hitherto delayed, Confessions of a Water-drinker."

[1] Referring to his own *Works*, 1818.

This—but for Robinson's remark—would be a sufficient answer; and indeed it may be said at once that Robinson probably was not a good judge of drunkards. Being a man of little imagination and exceptional decorum and self-control—his only excesses were in the direction of intolerance of the unrespectable—he may be considered a prejudiced witness to all intemperateness. Living close by, in the Temple, he saw much of Lamb, especially when Mary Lamb was away, and when therefore, ill-starred, lonely and depressed, Lamb was peculiarly in need of such excitement as a little alcohol too easily gave him, or of such an anodyne as could be found in too much. Deducing, with the cold uncharitableness of the logical Puritan, a regular habit from such irregularities, Robinson wrote as he did.—That I believe to be a true statement of this part of the case.

At the same time it is conceivable that Lamb may have been in a hopeless state of mind at this time. It may be that in the years 1812 and 1813 he had given way more frequently than heretofore. He was then at a difficult age, in the middle thirties, when a man has lost the ardour of youth and has not yet come to the serenity of age; a period when the question "Am I a failure?" is asked very searchingly, and low spirits are too frequent. Lamb's finest work was yet to come; but he could not know this, and he may have felt that for one who had begun as ambitiously as he, with a novel and a tragedy, there ought to be more reputation at thirty-seven than could come from hack-work for Godwin and contributions to an unsuccessful periodical like the *Reflector*. This is merely a theory; but some such sense of failure may have stifled his energies, disinclined him to write letters, and, particularly when his sister was ill—those seasons finding him naturally at his weakest and loneliest—have encouraged him to take refuge more and more in strong drink.

In a letter to Wordsworth in 1814, a year later, concerning the review of the *Excursion*, Lamb says: "I write with great difficulty, and can scarce command my own resolution to sit at writing an hour together. I am a poor creature, but I am leaving off gin." Wordsworth least of all of his friends would Lamb wish to deceive into the belief that he was too much in the power of alcohol; and we may therefore accept what he says as true. Thus accepting it, we may, I think, reasonably consider that the truth lay between the "Confessions" of 1813 and

Elia's note of 1822: that is to say, that Lamb was more in earnest in 1813 than he admitted in 1822, or that he affected more light-heartedness in 1822 than he had known in reality in 1813. My own belief is that he was in no sense the slave that he depicts, but that he had often, in less buoyant moods, allowed himself to speculate on the possibility of his passing into such bondage, and invented as terrible a realisation of these imaginative flights as he was able.

We have, I think, a more prosaic reason for the untruth of the "Confessions" in the circumstance that Lamb was in a public office where drunkenness was severely punished (witness the case of Tommy Bye, mentioned in a later chapter); and to write himself down a drunkard would be too foolish. He was never foolish in print. We may feel very certain that if the "Confessions" had been based upon anything more actual than an acute apprehension of the temptations and perils of drink, Lamb would never have retired from the East India House with a pension of £450 a year.

Admitting a tendency to vinous exaltation, we have to remember that Lamb lived at a time when public opinion was not what it is now, and when occasionally to finish a social evening beneath the table involved no stigma. And we must remember, too, what Lamb says in the "Confessions," of the effect of alcohol as a solvent of his stammering speech. Whatever injury may have been done to Respectability by Lamb's excesses was so much gain to Wit and Good Humour. But I am ashamed to touch the rôle of apologist.

It comes to this, that he must be a man very secure in his own righteousness who would pass condemnatory judgment upon Charles Lamb's only weakness. One of Talfourd's finest rhetorical efforts bears upon this question. "Will any one, acquainted with these secret passages of Lamb's history, wonder that, with a strong physical inclination for the stimulus and support of strong drinks—which man is framed moderately to rejoice in—he should snatch some wild pleasure 'between the acts' (as he called them) 'of his distressful drama,' and that, still more, during the loneliness of the solitude created by his sister's absences, he should obtain the solace of an hour's feverish dream? That, notwithstanding that frailty, he performed the duties of his hard lot with exemplary steadiness and discretion is

indeed wonderful—especially when it is recollected that he had himself been visited, when in the dawn of manhood, with his sister's malady, the seeds of which were doubtless in his frame. While that natural predisposition may explain an occasional flightiness of expression on serious matters, fruit of some wayward fancy, which flitted through his brain, without disturbing his constant reason or reaching his heart, and some little extravagances of fitful mirth, how does it heighten the moral courage by which the disease was controlled and the severest duties performed! Never surely was there a more striking example of the power of a virtuous, rather say, of a pious, wish to conquer the fiery suggestions of latent insanity than that presented by Lamb's history. Nervous, tremulous, as he seemed—so slight of frame that he looked only fit for the most placid fortune—when the dismal emergencies which chequered his life arose, he acted with as much promptitude and vigour as if he had never penned a stanza nor taken a glass too much, or was strung with herculean sinews."

If, however, the "Confessions" were taken seriously by many readers, Lamb, it must be admitted, had only himself to thank. They do not savour of a joke, and they contain several statements of fact. Twelve years from 1813 Lamb had been twenty-six; he was known to have an impediment in his speech; to have been an excessive smoker. The first set of friends that he mentions correspond, as I have shown, to Fenwick and Fell ("my drunken companions," as he called them to Manning); the second set to Burney, Rickman and the whist players.

The theory has been developed by Mr. Thomas Hutchinson, a student of Lamb from whom I hesitate to differ, that the essay was a deliberate jest designed to take in the editors of the *Philanthropist*, William Allen and James Mill, two determined Benthamites. But however one tries, the essay cannot be made to read like a work of humour.

The "Confessions of a Drunkard" were again published in 1854 as a temperance, or rather teetotal, tract, professedly being the true story of Charles Lamb's own tragedy. The following letter in the *Examiner* for April 29th, 1854, uttered a necessary protest:—

"Sir,—One of the noblest of the Essays of Elia has been re-published as a tract by Tweedie, with this perverted title, 'The Confessions of Charles Lamb.' This is, indeed, bringing down the bird of Heaven with a feather from his

own wing. 'The Confessions of a Drunkard' are, like all the Essays of Elia, written in the *first person*, and it would be equally unjust to print the words put into the mouth of Malcolm (in act 4th, scene 3rd of Macbeth) as the 'Confessions of William Shakespeare.' Is it because the life of Charles Lamb was a pattern of charity that those who are destitute of this virtue have singled him out as a warning? When *he* was told that a young lady of his acquaintance had married an innkeeper (the inference being that she had thereby lost caste), he replied with his sunniest smile, 'Has she, indeed; then I'll always send there for my beer.' Was there no 'self-denial' in his long life of devotedness to his insane sister? It is only among those who have never felt the purifying influences of his life and writings that he needs a vindication. But his memory is too precious to be held up to the contempt of *any* of his countrymen. I am, sir, yours truly,

"VINDICATOR."

The tract was withdrawn, but, lest the weakling should be deprived of all literary object lessons, the sad case of Hartley Coleridge was substituted.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### 1814

A Lean Year—An Engagement with the *Champion*—An Evening with the Aikins—George Dawe becomes an R.A.—A Walk to Enfield—Lamb and Music—The Review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*—Lamb and Gifford—A Discovery at No. 4 Inner Temple Lane—Mary Lamb's Article on Women.

FOUR extracts from Crabb Robinson's *Diary* complete the year 1813.

"June 11th, Friday, 1813:—When I came home C. Lamb was here. His sister had been taken ill and he had brought her from Windsor. He came with a note from Miss Hayes I was to answer.

"November 10th, Wednesday, 1813:—Took tea with Lamb. I also called and supped with Godwin. The Lambs were there. . . . Kenney was there.

"November 12th, 1813:—In the evening a party at Anthony Robinson's. The Lambs were there, and Charles seemed to enjoy himself. We played cards, and at the close of the evening he dryly said to Mrs. Robinson, 'I have enjoyed the evening much, which I do not often do at people's houses.'

"December 30th, 1813:—After dinner a rubber at Lamb's; then went with Lamb and Burney to Rickman's; Hazlitt there. Cards, as usual, were our amusement. Lamb was in a pleasant mood. Rickman spoke of Chatterton's forgeries. I saw one manuscript in which he had seventeen kinds of e's all written differently. 'Oh,' said Lamb, 'that must have been modern—written by one of "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease."'"[1]

In 1814 Lamb, so far as we know, published only the essay on "The Melancholy of Tailors," and wrote few letters. Towards the end of the year, however, as we shall see, he toiled over a review of Wordsworth's *Excursion* for the *Quarterly*, a task

[1] Pope's *Satires*, v., 108.

which caused his correspondence to reawaken. Crabb Robinson tells us that it was in 1814 that Lamb's parties began to be held once a month instead of once a week—a change induced probably by the health of Mary Lamb, who may have suffered under the weekly excitement.

Early in the year is a note to John Scott, editor of the *Champion*, who afterwards, as editor of the *London Magazine*, was to have a profound influence on Lamb's career. Scott we shall meet in 1820; in 1814 he seems to have asked Lamb for contributions to the *Champion*, a weekly paper of the *Examiner* type. Lamb promised some, but the only piece absolutely identifiable is the essay on "The Melancholy of Tailors," although I suspect his hand in some mock letters and in the choice of extracts from old writers. He cancelled the engagement at the end of the year.

Robinson's *Diary* yields some interesting entries:—

"Feb. 15th, 1814:—De Quincey came by appointment and we went together to Lamb, with whom we drank tea and stayed till 9. . . . The evening was rather dull. . . ." De Quincey tells us nothing of this visit; but, as we shall see, he describes his chagrin at Lamb's insensibility in the midst of national enthusiasm later in the year, on the declaration of peace, when Blucher was in England.

"May 15th, 1814:—At the Colliers'. Lamb and his sister this evening expressed great kindness towards me, and it gave me great pleasure. They indeed belong to the very best of persons. Their moral qualities are as distinguished as their intellectual."

Robinson had for some time wished to bring the Lambs and the Aikins together. On May 28th he succeeded. His *Diary* records the meeting. "May 28th, 1814:—After dinner with the Colliers accompanied Charles and Miss Lamb to Dr. Aikin's. The visit was highly agreeable to all parties. Lamb was quite on his good behaviour. He kept within bounds and yet was very pleasant. He related a droll history of a clerk in the India House suspected of living on human flesh, and he introduced the whimsical conceit that among cannibals a man who would not join in the common diet would be called a Misanthropist.[1] Lamb

[1] The joke about cannibalism seems to have been very near Lamb's heart. He accuses Simonds of it in a letter to Rickman, and one of his schoolfellows is laid under the same suspicion in the *Elia* essay on Christ's Hospital.

abused Gray's poetry, but the Aikins did not take up the assertion, and the Doctor's favourite opinion of the unimprovability of mankind met with no opposition from the L's. Miss A. admired both the wit and fine face of Lamb, and he was pleased with the family, particularly the old lady. I believe they will renew their visit. . . ."

It was in the spring of this year that George Dawe was made a Royal Academician. In May, just before the Allied Sovereigns came to London on a triumphant visit, Lamb called on the great painter. "His pleasant housekeeper seemed embarrassed; owned that her master was alone. But could he be spoken with? With some importunity I prevailed upon her to usher me up into his painting-room. It was in Newman-street. At his easel stood D., with an immense spread of canvas before him, and by his side a—live Goose. I enquired into this extraordinary combination. Under the rose he informed me, that he had undertaken to paint a transparency for Vauxhall, against an expected visit of the Allied Sovereigns to that place. I smiled at an engagement so derogatory to his new-born honours; but a contempt of small gains was never one of D.'s foibles. My eyes beheld crude forms of warriors, kings, rising under his brush upon this interminable stretch of cloth. The Wolga, the Don, and the Nieper, were there, or their representative River Gods; and Father Thames clubbed urns with the Vistula. Glory with her dazzling Eagle was not absent, nor Fame, nor Victory. The shade of Rubens might have evoked the mighty allegories. But what was the Goose? He was evidently *sitting* for a something.

"D. at last informed me, that having fixed upon a group of rivers, he could not introduce the Royal Thames without his *swans*. That he had enquired the price of a live swan, and it being more than he was prepared to give for it, he had bargained with the poulterer for the *next thing to it;* adding significantly, that it would do to roast, after it had served its turn to paint swans by. *Reader, this is a true story.*"

Crabb Robinson has a very interesting entry under Sunday, July 3rd: "A day of great pleasure. Charles Lamb and I walked to Enfield by Southgate, after an early breakfast in his chambers. We were most hospitably received by Anthony Robinson and his wife. After tea, Lamb and I returned. The whole day most delightfully fine, and the scenery very agreeable.

Lamb cared for the walk more than the scenery, for the enjoyment of which he seems to have no great susceptibility. His great delight, even in preference to a country walk, is a stroll in London. The shops and the busy streets, such as Thames Street, Bankside, &c., are his great favourites. He, for the same reason, has no relish for landscape painting. But his relish for historic painting is exquisite. Lamb's peculiarities are very interesting. We had not much conversation. He hummed tunes, I repeated Wordsworth's 'Daffodils,' of which I am become very fond. Lamb can relish the Thieves in the last stage of avarice, but which is beyond me.[1] At the same time he censures Wordsworth's narrative. Lamb praised T. Warton's 'Sonnet in Dugdale' as of first-rate excellence. It is a good thought, but I find nothing exquisite in it.[2] He praised Prior's courtly poems—his 'Down Hall'—his fine application of the names of Marlborough, as not so ill sounding as to be offensive to the ears of Boileau, his dedication to Lord Halifax, &c.

"Lamb and A. R[obinson] agreed together and seemed to enjoy the afternoon. Lamb expressed himself strongly against the keeping of a mistress, as more degrading and immoral than the most promiscuous intercourse, in which A. R. agreed. The holding a woman at once so near and yet at so great a distance is the most scandalous injustice and greatest wickedness."

Robinson's statement that Lamb hummed tunes is interesting when we recollect that in the *Elia* essay "On Ears" he denies the possession of any musical sense. We know, however, from the letter on page 286, that Braham's singing could draw him to the

[1] "The Two Thieves; or, The Last Stage of Avarice."
[2] This is Warton's Sonnet:—

WRITTEN IN A BLANK LEAF OF DUGDALE'S MONASTICON

DEEM not, devoid of elegance, the sage,
By fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd,
Of painful pedantry the poring child;
Who turns, of these proud domes, th' historic page,
Now sunk by time, and Henry's fiercer rage.
Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smil'd
On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage
His thoughts, on themes, unclassic falsely styl'd,
Intent. While cloister'd Piety displays
Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
New manners, and the pomp of elder days,
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers.

theatre every night, and Barron Field, in some biographical notes written in 1835, says that he loved certain beautiful airs, notably Kent's "O that I had Wings like a Dove," and Handel's "From Mighty Kings."

In a letter to Wordsworth on August 9th, 1814, Lamb refers to the excited condition of London upon the declaration of Peace between England and France: "Save for a late excursion to Harrow and a day or two on the banks of the Thames this Summer, rural images were fast fading from my mind; and by the wise provision of the Regent all that was countryfy'd in the Parks is all but obliterated. The very colour of green is vanishd; the whole surface of Hyde Park is dry crumbling sand (*Arabia Arenosa*), not a vestige or hint of grass ever having grown there. Booths and drinking-places go all round it for a mile and half, I am confident—I might say two miles in circuit."

We have heard so much of Lamb from Robinson, that a word or so of Robinson from Lamb is due. We find it in a letter to Coleridge, now in the west with the Morgans, in August, in reply to a request to Lamb to borrow certain of Crabb's books. Lamb had sent the letter to Robinson, then on circuit. "Crab [he says] might have answered by this time: his juices take a long time supplying, but they'll run at last—I know they will,—pure golden pippin. . . . A fearful rumour has since reached me that the Crab is on the eve of setting out for France. If he is in England, your letter will reach him, and I flatter myself a touch of the persuasive of my own, which accompanies it, will not be thrown away; if it be, he is a Sloe, and no true-hearted crab, and there's an end."

We now come to Lamb's unfortunate and only appearance as a critic in the *Quarterly Review*. Wordsworth, wishing to have the *Excursion* reviewed by Lamb, suggested the project to Southey, who put the matter before Gifford, the editor, for whom, as we have seen, Lamb very naturally had no love. Gifford acquiesced, and with many misgivings Lamb began his task—delayed a little by the detention of the book by Hazlitt, who reviewed it from this copy in the *Examiner*, not favourably. (Hazlitt and Lamb having had some little quarrel, Hazlitt borrowed the *Excursion* through Martin Burney.)

That Lamb admired—and even reverenced—the poem we know from his letter to Wordsworth of August 9th, 1814, where

he says, "It is the noblest conversational poem I ever read. A day in heaven;" adding, at the end of his criticism, this pleasant and very characteristic passage: "There is a deal of noble matter about mountain scenery, yet not so much as to overpower and discountenance a poor Londoner or South country man entirely, though Mary seems to have felt it occasionally a little too powerfully, for it was her remark during reading it that by your system it was doubtful whether a Liver in Towns had a Soul to be Saved. She almost trembled for that invisible part of us in her."

After infinite difficulty Lamb at last finished and despatched his review, which was printed in the *Quarterly* for October, 1814, a number not issued, however, until almost the end of the year. When Lamb saw it, and found that Gifford had made alterations with the utmost freedom, his mortification was profound. "Whatever inadequateness it had to its subject," he assures Wordsworth, "it was in point of composition the prettiest piece of prose I ever writ: and so my sister (to whom alone I read the MS.) said. That charm, if it had any, is all gone: more than a third of the substance is cut away and that not all from one place, but *passim*, so as to make utter nonsense. Every warm expression is changed for a nasty cold one." It is unfortunate that the original manuscript of the article has not been preserved.

On November 2nd, in a charming letter to Barbara Betham, Matilda Betham's small sister, Mary Lamb tells of a great discovery at No. 4 Inner Temple Lane: "Soon after you left us we were distressed by the cries of a cat, which seemed to proceed from the garrets adjoining to ours, and only separated from ours by a locked door on the farther side of my brother's bedroom, which you know was the little room at the top of the kitchen stairs. We had the lock forced and let poor puss out from behind a panel of the wainscot, and she lived with us from that time, for we were in gratitude bound to keep her, as she had introduced us to four untenanted, unowned rooms, and by degrees we have taken possession of these unclaimed apartments, first putting up lines to dry our clothes, then moving my brother's bed into one of these, more commodious than his own room. And last winter, my brother being unable to pursue a work he had begun, owing to the kind interruptions of friends who were more at leisure than himself, I persuaded him that he might write at his ease in one of these rooms, as he could not then hear the door knock, or hear

himself denied to be at home, which was sure to make him call out and convict the poor maid in a fib. Here, I said, he might be almost really not at home. So I put in an old grate, and made him a fire in the largest of these garrets, and carried in one table and one chair, and bid him write away, and consider himself as much alone as if he were in a new lodging in the midst of Salisbury Plain, or any other wide, unfrequented place where he could expect few visitors to break in upon his solitude. I left him quite delighted with his new acquisition, but in a few hours he came down again with a sadly dismal face. He could do nothing, he said, with those bare whitewashed walls before his eyes. He could not write in that dull unfurnished prison.

"The next day, before he came home from his office, I had gathered up various bits of old carpeting to cover the floor; and, to a little break the blank look of the bare walls, I hung up a few old prints that used to ornament the kitchen; and after dinner, with great boast of what improvement I had made, I took Charles once more into his new study. A week of busy labours followed, in which I think you would not have disliked to have been our assistant. My brother and I almost covered the walls with prints, for which purpose he cut out every print from every book in his old library, coming in every now and then to ask my leave to strip a fresh poor author—which he might not do, you know, without my permission, as I am elder sister. There was such pasting, such consultation where their portraits, and where the series of pictures from Ovid, Milton, and Shakespear would show to most advantage, and in what obscure corner authors of humbler note might be allowed to tell their stories. All the books gave up their stores but one, a translation from Ariosto, a delicious set of four and twenty prints, and for which I had marked out a conspicuous place; when lo! we found at the moment the scissars were going to work, that a part of the poem was printed at the back of every picture. What a cruel disappointment! To conclude this long story about nothing, the poor despised garret is now called the print room, and is become our most favorite sitting room."

Under the date December 11th, 1814, Crabb Robinson has this: "After reading at home from eight to ten I called on Miss Lamb, and chatted with her, her brother being in bed, from 10 to 11. She was not unwell, but she had undergone great fatigue

from writing an article about needlework for the new *Ladies' British Magazine*. She spoke of writing as a most painful occupation, which only necessity could make her attempt. She has been learning Latin merely to assist her in acquiring a correct style. Yet, while she speaks of inability to write, what grace and talent has she not manifested in *Mrs. Leicester's School*, &c." The real title of the periodical was the *British Lady's Magazine*. The article "On Needlework" (which is printed in Vol. I. of my edition of the Lambs' works) was published in the number for April, 1815. It abounds in Mary Lamb's shrewd, practical common sense, with perhaps a note of irony now and then, as at the end of the following passage: "In how many ways is a good woman employed, in thought or action, through the day, in order that her *good man* may be enabled to feel his leisure hours *real substantial holyday*, and perfect respite from the cares of business! Not the least part to be done to accomplish this end is to fit herself to become a conversational companion; that is to say, she has to study and understand the subjects on which he loves to talk. This part of our duty, if strictly performed, will be found by far our hardest part. The disadvantages we labour under from an education differing from a manly one make the hours in which we *sit and do nothing* in men's company too often any thing but a relaxation; although, as to pleasure and instruction, time so passed may be esteemed more or less delightful.

"To make a man's home so desirable a place as to preclude his having a wish to pass his leisure hours at any fireside in preference to his own, I should humbly take to be the sum and substance of woman's domestic ambition. I would appeal to our *British ladies*, who are generally allowed to be the most jealous and successful of all women in the pursuit of this object,—I would appeal to them who have been most successful in the performance of this laudable service, in behalf of father, son, husband, or brother, whether an anxious desire to perform this duty well is not attended with enough of *mental* exertion, at least, to incline them to the opinion that women may be more properly ranked among the contributors to, than the partakers of, the undisturbed relaxation of man."

In December Mary Lamb was taken ill again. Says Robinson, on the 20th: "Late in the evening Lamb called, to sit with me

while he smoked his pipe." (Tobacco not abandoned yet!) "I had called on him late last night and he seemed absurdly grateful for the visit. He wanted society, being alone. I abstained from inquiring after his sister and trust he will appreciate the motive." In the last letter of the year, on December 28th, to Wordsworth, Lamb says: "Mary keeps pretty bad."

## CHAPTER XXX

### 1815-1816

Enter Thomas Noon Talfourd—India House Bondage—The Frugal Wordsworth—Crabb Robinson's *Diary*—The Wordsworths in London—A Visit to Mackery End—Barron Field—The Cambridge Adventures—Mary Lamb Again Ill—Nonsense to Manning—A Happy 1816—Coleridge settles at Highgate—A Month at Calne, in Wiltshire—Hazlitt's Article on Coleridge—Rustication at Dalston.

AT the beginning of 1815 Lamb and his biographer, Thomas Noon Talfourd, met for the first time. Talfourd, aged twenty, a law student under the tuition of Joseph Chitty, the special pleader, in rooms on the next staircase to Lamb's in Inner Temple Lane, was invited to meet Lamb, whom he had long admired and even reverenced, at dinner at the house of Mr. William Evans. (Evans, who held office in the East India House, and was the proprietor of the *Pamphleteer*, for which Talfourd, who began his intellectual life very early, had written, was the friend for whom two years later Joseph painted Lamb's portrait, reproduced opposite page 10 of Vol. II.) I quote Talfourd's story: "My duties at the office did not allow me to avail myself of this invitation to dinner, but I went up at ten o'clock, through a deep snow, palpably congealing into ice, and was amply repaid when I reached the hospitable abode of my friend. There was Lamb, preparing to depart, but he stayed half an hour in kindness to me, and then accompanied me to our common home—the Temple.

"Methinks I see him before me now, as he appeared then, and as he continued, with scarcely any perceptible alteration to me, during the twenty years of intimacy which followed, and were closed by his death. A light frame, so fragile that it seemed as if a breath would overthrow it, clad in clerk-like black, was surmounted by a head of form and expression the most noble and sweet. His black hair curled crisply about an expanded forehead; his eyes, softly brown, twinkled with varying expression,

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Yours faithfully

T N Talfourd

THOMAS NOON TALFOURD

though the prevalent feeling was sad; and the nose slightly curved, and delicately carved at the nostril, with the lower outline of the face regularly oval, completed a head which was finely placed on the shoulders, and gave importance, and even dignity, to a diminutive and shadowy stem. Who shall describe his countenance—catch its quivering sweetness—and fix it for ever in words? There are none, alas! to answer the vain desire of friendship. Deep thought, striving with humour; the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth; and a smile of painful sweetness, present an image to the mind it can as little describe as lose. His personal appearance and manner are not unfitly characterised by what he himself says in one of his letters to Manning of Braham—'a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel.'

"He took my arm, and we walked to the Temple, Lamb stammering out fine remarks as we walked; and when we reached his staircase, he detained me with an urgency which would not be denied, and we mounted to the top story, where an old petted servant, called Becky, was ready to receive us. We were soon seated beside a cheerful fire; hot water and its better adjuncts were before us; and Lamb insisted on my sitting with him while he smoked 'one pipe'—for, alas! for poor human nature—he had resumed his acquaintaince with his 'fair traitress.' How often the pipe and the glasses were replenished, I will not undertake to disclose; but I can never forget the conversation: though the first, it was more solemn, and in higher mood, than any I ever after had with Lamb through the whole of our friendship. How it took such a turn between two strangers, one of them a lad of not quite twenty, I cannot tell; but so it happened. We discoursed then of life and death, and our anticipation of a world beyond the grave. Lamb spoke of these awful themes with the simplest piety, but expressed his own fond cleavings to life—to all well-known accustomed things—and a shivering (not shuddering) sense of that which is to come, which he so finely indicated in his 'New Year's Eve,' years afterwards. It was two o'clock before we parted, when Lamb gave me a hearty invitation to renew my visit at pleasure; but two or three months elapsed before I saw him again.

"In the meantime, a number of the 'Pamphleteer' contained an 'Essay on the Chief Living Poets,' among whom on the title appeared the name of Lamb, and some page or two were expressly

devoted to his praises. It was a poor tissue of tawdry eulogies—a shallow outpouring of young enthusiasm in fine words, which it mistakes for thoughts; yet it gave Lamb, who had hitherto received scarcely civil notice from reviewers, great pleasure to find that any one recognised him as having a place among poets. The next time I saw him, he came almost breathless into the office, and proposed to give me what I should have chosen as the greatest of all possible honours and delights—an introduction to Wordsworth, who I learned, with a palpitating heart, was actually at the next door. I hurried out with my kind conductor, and a minute after was presented by Lamb to the person whom in all the world I venerated most, with this preface:—'Wordsworth, give me leave to introduce to you my only admirer.'"

The literary unproductiveness of this period seems to have been due, at any rate in part, to overwork at the East India House. Nominally the hours were nine to three, but we find Lamb writing to Wordsworth on April 7th: "I should have written before, but I am cruelly engaged and like to be. On Friday I was at office from 10 in the morning (two hours dinner except) to 11 at night, last night till 9. My business and office business in general has increased so. I don't mean I am there every night, but I must expect a great deal of it. I never leave till 4—and do not keep a holyday now once in ten times, where I used to keep all red letter days, and some fine days besides which I used to dub Nature's holydays. I have had my day. I had formerly little to do. So of the little that is left of life I may reckon two thirds as dead, for Time that a man may call his own is his Life, and hard work and thinking about it taints even the leisure hours, stains Sunday with workday contemplations. This is Sunday, and the headache I have is part late hours at work the 2 preceding nights and part later hours over a consoling pipe afterwards. But I find stupid acquiescence coming over me. I bend to the yoke, and it is almost with me and my household as with the man and his consort—

> To them each evening had its glittering star
> And every Sabbath day its golden sun—[1]

to such straits am I driven for the Life of life, Time—O that from that superfluity of Holyday leisure my youth wasted 'Age might but take some hours youth wanted not.—' *N.B.*—I have left off

[1] In the *Excursion*, Book V.

spirituous liquors for 4 or more months, with a moral certainty of its lasting." The same strain of India House weariness breaks out again, in the fine letter to Wordsworth on April 28th: "I don't often go out a maying. *Must* is the tense with me now. Do you take the Pun? . . . I wish you would write more criticism, about Spenser &c. I think I could say something about him myself—but Lord bless me—these 'merchants and their spicy drugs' which are so harmonious to sing of, they lime-twig up my poor soul and body, till I shall forget I ever thought myself a bit of a genius! I can't even put a few thoughts on paper for a newspaper. I 'engross,' when I should pen a paragraph. Confusion blast all mercantile transactions, all traffick, exchange of commodities, intercourse between nations, all the consequent civilization and wealth and amity and link of society, and getting rid of prejudices, and knowledge of the face of the globe—and rot the very firs of the forest that look so romantic alive, and die into desks. Vale." None the less Lamb's two April letters to Wordsworth, criticising the 1815 edition of his poems, are fine literature.

On August 9th, however, an improvement seems possible. "I have a glimmering aspect, a chink-light of liberty before me which I pray God may prove not fallacious. My remonstrances have stirred up others to remonstrate, and altogether, there is a plan for separating certain parts of business from our department, which if it take place will produce me more time, i.e. my evenings free. It may be a means of placing me in a more conspicuous situation which will knock at my nerves another way, but I wait the issue in submission. If I can but begin my own day at 4 o' Clock in the afternoon, I shall think myself to have Eden days of peace and liberty to what I have had. . . . If I do but get rid of auditing Warehousekeepers' Accounts and get no worse-harassing task in the place of it, what a Lord of Liberty I shall be. I shall dance and skip and make mouths at the invisible event, and pick the thorns out of my pillow and throw 'em at rich men's night caps, and talk blank verse, hoity toity, and sing A Clerk I was in London Gay, ban, ban, Ca-Caliban, like the emancipated monster, and go where I like up this street or down that alley."

Lamb's hopes were largely fulfilled. In 1815 a reorganisation of labour and salary was effected, consequent upon the loss of a considerable part of the trading privileges of the Company, from which Lamb emerged triumphant, his salary rising suddenly from

about £240 to £480, whence it was to mount steadily to £700, in 1821, and £730 in his last year of office.[1]

The year, although no essays are credited to it, produced some excellent letters of criticism to Wordsworth upon the 1815 edition of his poems, and of nonsense to Manning in China. It was also in 1815 that Mary Lamb made her first joke. Lamb, reading Wordsworth's poem, "The Strid," looked up to ask her, "as if putting a riddle, '*What is good for a bootless bene?*' To which, with infinite presence of mind (as the jest-book has it), she answered, 'a shoeless pea.' It was the first joke she ever made."

Some of Crabb Robinson's entries follow :—

"Jan. 23rd, 1815 :—I then went to Lamb ; he was glad to see me. He complained of his solitary evenings and that he was harassed by the business of his office, which, with the affliction his sister's illness caused him, renders his life wretched. He is indeed unhappy. I will try to be frequent in my visits for they relieve his spirits.

"Feb. 7th, 1815 :—At 9 I sat with Lamb. He was low-spirited. Miss Lamb's protracted illness and the difficulties he finds in the business of his office almost distract him." On February 26th, however, we are glad to find that Mary Lamb was one of a party at Alsager's, Barnes being another. Thomas Massa Alsager, a friend of Robinson, was a musical and financial writer on the *Times*.

In May of this year the Wordsworths were in town, and Robinson records meeting them several times at the Lambs'. He adds to one of his entries: "Hazlitt said in his ferocious way at Alsager's that if Lamb in his criticism [in the *Quarterly*] had found but one fault with Wordsworth, he would never have forgiven him But some truth there is in the extravagant statement."

"May 23rd, Tuesday :—I went to Lamb and took tea with Wordsworth there. Alsager, B. Field, Talfourd, the Colliers, etc., stepped in later. . . . Miss Hutchinson was at L.'s this evening : she is a plain woman—rather repulsive at first—but she

[1] To have a friend in a Government or Public Office was not without advantage. On April 27th of this year I find Wordsworth writing to Mr. R. P. Gillies, at Edinburgh (in a note which, I think, has not been published) : "By means of a Friend in London I can have my letters free. His name is Lamb and if you add an *e* to his name he will not open them. Direct as below without anything further :—

Mr. Lambe, India House, London."

Coleridge had also made use of the same economical device.

improves on acquaintance greatly. She is a lively and sensible little woman." This was Sarah Hutchinson, Mrs. Wordsworth's sister, who drew from Lamb so many good letters.

"May 25th:—I accompanied Miss Lamb to the theatre, where we were joined by the Wordsworths." They saw Kean in "Richard II." And on May 28th Robinson again met the Wordsworths, first at Collier's and then at the Lambs'. He records that he began to feel "quite cordial with Mrs. Wordsworth."

The battle of Waterloo naturally has no mention in Lamb's correspondence—such trivialities did not interest him—but in August we find him remarking to Southey: "Don't you think Louis the Desirable is in a sort of quandary? After all, Buonaparte is a fine fellow, as my barber says, and I should not mind standing bareheaded at his table to do him service in his fall. They should have given him Hampton Court or Kensington, with a tether extending forty miles round London. Qu. Would not the people have ejected the Brunswicks some day in his favour? Well, we shall see."

Crabb Robinson again. "June 17th:—I went late to Lamb's. His party were there, and a numerous and odd set they were—for the greater part interesting and amusing people—George Dyer, Captain and Martin Burney, Ayrton, Phillips, Hazlitt and wife, Alsager, Barron Field, Coulson, John Collier, Talfourd, White, Lloyd, and Basil Montagu. Montagu I had never been in company with; his feeling face and gentle tones are very interesting, but it is said that those tones are all adopted *ad captandum*. Perhaps in B. Montagu affectation is become a habit and so lost its nature. Wordsworth says he is a 'philanthropized courtier.'" The name of Lloyd is the only surprise in Robinson's list. It would be Charles Lloyd, now forty years old, in London for a brief visit to arrange for the publication of his translation of Alfieri. Coulson would be Walter Coulson of the *Morning Chronicle*, "The Walking Encyclopædia" as he was called.

I conjecture, for reasons stated on page 23, that it was in the summer of 1815 that Charles and Mary Lamb, with Barron Field, made their famous journey to Mackery End, to revive old memories and see what manner of folk their cousins were. Lamb's writings contain nothing more simply charming than the essay that describes this excursion.

"The only thing left was to get into the house—and that was a difficulty which to me singly would have been insurmountable; for I am terribly shy in making myself known to strangers and out-of-date kinsfolk. Love, stronger than scruple, winged my cousin in without me; but she soon returned with a creature that might have sat to a sculptor for the image of Welcome. It was the youngest of the Gladmans; who, by marriage with a Bruton, had become mistress of the old mansion. A comely brood are the Brutons. Six of them, females, were noted as the handsomest young women in the county. But this adopted Bruton, in my mind, was better than they all—more comely. She was born too late to have remembered me. She just recollected in early life to have had her cousin Bridget once pointed out to her, climbing a style. But the name of kindred, and of cousinship, was enough. Those slender ties, that prove slight as gossamer in the rending atmosphere of a metropolis, bind faster, as we found it, in hearty, homely, loving Hertfordshire. In five minutes we were as thoroughly acquainted as if we had been born and bred up together; were familiar, even to the calling each other by our Christian names. So Christians should call one another. To have seen Bridget, and her—it was like the meeting of the two scriptural cousins! There was a grace and dignity, an amplitude of form and stature, answering to her mind, in this farmer's wife, which would have shined in a palace—or so we thought it. We were made welcome by husband and wife equally—we, and our friend that was with us—I had almost forgotten him—but B. F. [Barron Field] will not so soon forget that meeting, if peradventure he shall read this on the far distant shores where the Kangaroo haunts. The fatted calf was made ready, or rather was already so, as if in anticipation of our coming; and, after an appropriate glass of native wine, never let me forget with what honest pride this hospitable cousin made us proceed to Wheathampstead, to introduce us (as some new-found rarity) to her mother and sister Gladmans, who did indeed know something more of us, at a time when she almost knew nothing.—With what corresponding kindness we were received by them also—how Bridget's memory, exalted by the occasion, warmed into a thousand half-obliterated recollections of things and persons, to my utter astonishment, and her own—and to the astoundment of B. F. who sat by, almost the only thing that was not a cousin there,—old effaced images of

more than half-forgotten names and circumstances still crowding back upon her, as words written in lemon come out upon exposure to a friendly warmth,—when I forget all this, then may my country cousins forget me ; and Bridget no more remember, that in the days of weakling infancy I was her tender charge—as I have been her care in foolish manhood since—in those pretty pastoral walks, long ago, about Mackery End, in Hertfordshire."

And here a word or so of B. F., to whom Lamb addressed the *Elia* essay on "Distant Correspondents." Barron Field, whose father was Henry Field, apothecary to Christ's Hospital (after Lamb's day), was by more than eight years Lamb's junior. When they first met I cannot say, but the introduction was probably through his brother, Francis John Field, who was a clerk in the India House. Barron Field varied his legal studies with literature, contributed to the *Reflector*, and was for a while dramatic critic for the *Times*. Later in life he edited Heywood for the old Shakespeare Society. In 1816 he obtained the post of Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, and remained in Australia until 1824. Returning to England he tarried only a short time and then left again, to be Chief Justice at Gibraltar, where the young Disraeli, airily travelling through Europe, found him a bore. Field seems to have been a kindly and intelligent man, but he lives rather by his place in Lamb's writings than by any literary merit of his own.

Among the Crabb Robinson papers is an interesting letter from Field on February 16th, 1835, on the subject of Lamb's biographer. "I thank you for your account of our dear friend Lamb's death and of Mary Lamb's death-in-life. Their lives should be written together ; and I understand Moxon means to do it. I shall send him my letters. In the meantime the works should be collected from all quarters : *The Reflector*, *The London*, *The Examiner*, *The Athenæum*, *The New Times*, Hone, &c., and certainly including *Mrs. Leicester's School*. Southey would make the best Editor. I should make the next best. But I think Moxon will do very well. I know Lamb had been long feeding him with materials and letters for his life. . . . Talfourd has too much to do and would write too fine. But heavens preserve us from a monster of the name of Forster ! Having written the memoir of Coleridge for Longman's last Annual Biography, I have promised something of Lamb for the next; but my trickle will stand in no biographer's way."

Field's article in the *Annual Biography* for 1836 does not contain anything very intimately informing; but he makes an interesting point in remarking that the stories and characters of all Lamb's plays, poems and essays turn upon some weakness of humanity with which he had a lively sympathy and towards which he extended a large charity. But with the following judgment it is not easy to be wholly in agreement: "In his estimation of prints and pictures, as well as of actors and actresses, we think that, like all near-sighted people, he had 'visions of his own,' and would not 'undo them.'" Field seems to me here rather to defend his own differences of opinion than to convince Lamb of bad or prejudiced judgment.

Barron Field died in 1841; his widow, born Jane Carncroft, to whom Lamb had written verses, survived until 1878. Lamb knew also other members of the Field family, and in 1824 he wrote a prologue for an amateur performance of "Richard II." to be given at Henry Field's house. The late Miss Mary Louisa Field, to whom also he addressed some lines, told Canon Ainger that she sat by Lamb's side during the play, and among his drolleries remembered particularly how, on a looking-glass being broken, he turned to her and whispered "sax-pence!" while when the butler announced a Mr. Negus, he called out "Hand him round!" This may possibly have been the occasion of another story, told of Lamb, that he said of all the company he liked the prompter best—because he heard him most and saw him least.

The Fields, though an old Hertfordshire family, were no connection of Lamb's grandmother, Mary Field, nor, I think, of his godfather, Francis Fielde.

The August correspondence yields some good passages. To Southey: "I am going to stand godfather; I don't like the business; I cannot muster up decorum for these occasions; I shall certainly disgrace the font. I was at Hazlitt's marriage, and had like to have been turned out several times during the ceremony. Any thing awful makes me laugh. I misbehaved once at a funeral. Yet I can read about these ceremonies with pious and proper feelings. The realities of life only seem the mockeries." (I have not discovered what child's sins it was that Lamb was to take upon himself.)

To Wordsworth, apropos of Talfourd's presents of fruit: "There is something inexpressibly pleasant to me in these

*presents.* Be it fruit, or fowl, or brawn, or *what not. Books* are a legitimate cause of acceptance. If presents be not the soul of friendship, undoubtedly they are the most spiritual part of the body of that intercourse. There is too much narrowness of thinking in this point. The punctilio of acceptance methinks is too confined and straitlaced. I could be content to receive money, or clothes, or a joint of meat from a friend; why should he not send me a dinner as well as a dessert? I would taste him in the beasts of the field, and thro' all creation. Therefore did the basket of fruit of the juvenile Talfourd not displease me. Not that I have any thoughts of bartering or reciprocating these things. To send him any thing in return would be to reflect suspicion of mercenariness upon what I know he meant a freewill offering. Let him overcome me in bounty. In this strife a generous nature loves to be overcome."

And in August came a happy interlude, described very charmingly in a letter of Mary Lamb to Miss Hutchinson, which I print almost in full—one of the best letters from Mary Lamb's pen that exists.

[Dated at end: August 20, 1815.]

"I am going to do a queer thing—I have wearied myself with writing a long letter to Mrs. Morgan a part of which is an incoherent rambling account of a jaunt we have just been taking. I want to tell you all about it for we so seldom do such things that it runs strangely in my head and I feel too tired to give you other than the mere copy of the nonsense I have just been writing.

"'Last Saturday was the grand feast day of the India House Clerks. I think you must have heard Charles talk of his yearly turtle feast. He has been lately much wearied with work, and, glad to get rid of all connected with it, he *used* Saturday, the feast day being a holiday, *borrowed* the Monday following, and we set off on the outside of the Cambridge Coach from Fetter Lane at eight o'clock and were driven into Cambridge in great triumph by Hell Fire Dick five minutes before three—Richard is in high reputation, he is private tutor to the Whip Club. Journeys used to be tedious torments to me, but seated out in the open air I enjoyed every mile of the way—the first twenty miles was particularly pleasing to me, having been accustomed to go so far on that road in the Ware Stage Coach to visit my Grandmother in the days of other times.

"'In my life I never spent so many pleasant hours together as I did at Cambridge. We were walking the whole time—out of one College into another. If you ask me which I like best I must make the children's traditionary unoffending reply to all curious enquirers, "*Both.*" I liked them all best. The little gloomy ones, because they were little gloomy ones. I felt as if I could live and die in them and never wish to speak again. And the fine grand Trinity College Oh how fine it was! And King's College Chapel, what a place! I heard the Cathedral service there, and having been no great church goer of late years *that* and the painted windows and the general effect of the whole thing affected me wonderfully.

"'I certainly like St. John's College best—I had seen least of it, having only been over it once, so, on the morning we returned I got up at six o'clock and wandered into it by myself—by myself indeed, for there was nothing alive to be seen but one cat who followed me about like a dog. Then I went over Trinity, but nothing hailed me there, not even a cat.

"'On the Sunday we met with a pleasant thing. We had been congratulating each other that we had come alone to enjoy, as the miser his feast, all our sights greedily to ourselves, but having seen all we began to grow flat and wish for this and tother body with us, when we were accosted by a young gownsman whose face we knew but where or how we had seen him we could not tell, and were obliged to ask his name: he proved to be a young man we had seen twice at Alsager's. He turned out a very pleasant fellow—shewed us the insides of places—we took him to our Inn to dinner, and drank tea with him in such a delicious college room, and then again he supped with us. We made our meals as short as possible, to lose no time, and walked our young conductor almost off his legs. Even when the fried eels were ready for supper and coming up, having a message from a man who we had bribed for the purpose, that then we might see Oliver Cromwell,[1] who was *not at home* when we called to see him, we sallied out again and made him a visit by candlelight—and so ended our sights. When we were setting out in the morning our new friend came to bid us good bye and rode with us as far as Trompington. I never saw a creature so happy as he was the whole time he was with us, he

[1] Cooper's portrait of Cromwell at Sidney-Sussex.

said we had put him in such good spirits that [he] should certainly pass an examination well that he is to go through in six weeks in order to qualify himself to obtain a fellowship.

"'Returning home down old Fetter Lane I could hardly keep from crying to think it was all over. With what pleasure [Charles] shewed me Jesus College where Coleridge was—the barbe[r's shop] where Manning was—the house where Lloyd lived—Franklin's rooms (a young schoolfellow with whom Charles was the first time he went to Cambridge), I peeped in at his window, the room looked quite deserted—old chairs standing about in disorder that seemed to have stood there ever since they had sate in them. I write sad nonsense about these things, but I wish you had heard Charles talk his nonsense over and over again about his visit to Franklin and how he then first felt himself commencing gentleman and had eggs for his breakfast.' Charles Lamb commencing gentleman!

"A lady who is sitting by me seeing what I am doing says I remind her of her husband, who acknowledged that the first love letter he wrote to her was a copy of one he had made use of on a former occasion. . . ."

Charles Lamb adds: "Dear Miss Hutchinson, I subscribe most willingly to all my sister says of her Enjoyment at Cambridge. She was in silent raptures all the while *there*, and came home riding thro' the air (her 1st long outside journey) triumphing as if she had been *graduated*. I remember one foolish-pretty expression she made use of, 'Bless the little churches how pretty they are' as those symbols of civilized life opened upon her view one after the other on this side Cambridge. You cannot proceed a mile without starting a steeple, with its little patch of villagery round it enverduring the waste. I don't know how you will pardon part of her letter being a transcript, but writing to another Lady first (probably as the *easiest task*) it was unnatural not to give you an acco$^{t}$. of what had so freshly delighted her, and would have been a piece of transcendant rhetorick (above her modesty) to have given two different accounts of a simple and univocal pleasure. Bless me how learned I write! but I always forget myself when I write to Ladies. One cannot tame ones erudition down to their merely English apprehensions."

In September Mary Lamb was again ill. Writing to Sarah Hutchinson Lamb says: "The return of her disorder has been frightfully soon this time, with scarce a six month's interval. I

am almost afraid my worry of spirits about the E. I. House was partly the cause of her illness, but one always imputes it to the cause next at hand; more probably it comes from some cause we have no control over or conjecture of. It cuts sad great slices out of the time, the little time we shall have to live together. I don't know but the recurrence of these illnesses might help me to sustain her death better than if we had had no partial separations. But I won't talk of death. I will imagine us immortal, or forget that we are otherwise. By God's blessing in a few weeks we may be making our meal together, or sitting in the front row of the Pit at Drury Lane, or taking our evening walk past the theatres, to look at the outside of them at least, if not to be tempted in. Then we forget we are assailable, we are strong for the time as rocks, the wind is tempered to the shorn Lambs."

On November 14th Robinson writes: "After nine I called on Charles Lamb. He was much better in health and spirits than when I saw him last. Though tête-à-tête, he was able to pun. I was speaking of my first brief, when he asked, 'Did you not exclaim when you had your first brief—

Thou Great First Cause, least understood?'"[1]

"Nov. 20th, 1815:—I called late on Lamb to see Miss L., who I understood was returned. I found Lamb's brother (John) there, and played whist with him and Martin Burney and Miss L. John L. is so grossly rude and vulgar so that I am resolved never to play with him again.

"November 24th, 1815:—I called on Lamb, and chatted an hour with him. Talfourd stepped in, and we had a pleasant hour's conversation. Lamb has a very exclusive taste, and spoke with equal contempt of Voltaire's Tales and 'Gil Blas.' He may be right in thinking the latter work belongs to a low class of compositions, but he ought not to deny its excellence in its kind."

We may take leave of the year 1815 with a passage of delicious nonsense from a letter to Manning, written on Christmas Day: "Your friends have all got old—those you left blooming—myself (who am one of the few that remember you), those golden hairs which you recollect my taking a pride in, turned to silvery and grey. Mary has been dead and buried many years—she desired to be buried in the silk gown you sent her. Rickman, that you

[1] Pope's "Universal Prayer".

remember active and strong, now walks out supported by a servant-maid and a stick. Martin Burney is a very old man. . . . Coleridge is just dead, having lived just long enough to close the eyes of Wordsworth, who paid the debt to nature but a week or two before. Poor Col., but two days before he died, he wrote to a bookseller proposing an epic poem on the 'Wanderings of Cain,' in twenty-four books. It is said he has left behind him more than forty thousand treatises in criticism and metaphysics but few of them in a state of completion. They are now destined, perhaps, to wrap up spices." Lamb's news of himself is that he has gone into the Fishmongers' Almshouses.

On the following day Lamb wrote again, more seriously. "This very night I am going to *leave off tobacco!* Surely there must be some other world in which this unconquerable purpose shall be realised."

In 1816 there are only six letters, and Lamb, so far as I am aware, wrote nothing. But it was a peculiarly happy year. We know Lamb's work in the East India House to have been lightened and his salary doubled; there is no record of Mary Lamb having been taken ill; the brother and sister had a month's holiday at Calne with the Morgans, in the summer, and on returning went with delight into lodgings at Dalston, which was then a rural spot, in order to continue to benefit by country air; while, added to this, Coleridge returned to London and, after a lapse or so, began what promised to be a more rational and healthy mode of life under Gillman's care.

Crabb Robinson helps us to a few facts:—

"Feb. 12th, 1816:—To Drury Lane with Jane Collier and Miss Lamb to see 'A New Way to Pay Old Debts.' Kean as Sir Giles Overreach.

"April 6th, 1816:—I met Miss Lamb by accident, and in consequence took tea with her and Charles. I found Coleridge and Morgan at their house. Coleridge . . . is endeavouring to bring a tragedy on the stage. . . ." The tragedy was "Zapolya," which was, however, refused by Drury Lane and ultimately published as "A Christmas Tale."

Coleridge had just come to town from Calne, hoping to sell his play. Writing to Wordsworth on April 9th, Lamb says: "Nature who conducts every creature by instinct to its best end, has skilfully directed C. to take up his abode at a Chemist's

Laboratory in Norfolk Street. She might as well have sent a Helluo Librorum for cure to the Vatican. God keep him inviolate among the traps and pitfalls. He has done pretty well as yet." Coleridge, however, knew himself to be in a critical state, and on the day of Lamb's letter consulted Dr. Adams of Hatton Garden as to the possibility of leaving off opium. Adams wrote to James Gillman of Highgate suggesting that in Coleridge he would find a resident patient of great interest; and on April 18th Coleridge entered Gillman's house in the Grove, with the proof sheets of "Christabel" in his hand, there to remain until his death eighteen years later.

On April 20th Lamb, who had been correcting the revises of Wordsworth's "Letter to a Friend of Burns," and of his "Thanksgiving Ode," tells the news. "Coleridge is printing Christabel by Lord Byron's recommendation to Murray, with what he calls a vision, Kubla Khan, which said vision he repeats so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven and Elysian bowers into my parlour while he sings or says it. . . . He is at present under the medical care of a Mr. Gilman (Killman?) a Highgate Apothecary, where he plays at leaving off Laud—m. I think his essentials not touched; he is very bad, but then he wonderfully picks up another day, and his face when he repeats his verses hath its ancient glory, an Archangel a little damaged.

"Will Miss H. pardon our not replying at length to her kind Letter? We are not quiet enough. Morgan is with us every day, going betwixt Highgate and the Temple. Coleridge is absent but 4 miles, and the neighbourhood of such a man is as exciting as the presence of 50 ordinary Persons. 'Tis enough to be within the whiff and wind of his genius, for us not to possess our souls in quiet. If I lived with him or the *author of the Excursion*, I should in a very little time lose my own identity, and be dragged along in the current of other peoples' thoughts, hampered in a net. How cool I sit in this office, with no possible interruption further than what I may term *material*."

On July 13th Crabb Robinson makes Lamb as "delighted as a child" by giving Miss Lamb a framed print of Leonardo da Vinci's "Virgin of the Rocks," a picture upon which both brother and sister wrote poems. "I am to change the frame for him, as all his other frames are black. How Lamb confirms the remark of the child-likeness of Genius!"

A little later in the month the Lambs left London on their visit to Calne, in Wiltshire. Towards its close Lamb wrote to Henry Dodwell, a fellow clerk at the India House, one of his most amusing letters. "Heigh Ho! Lord have mercy upon me, how many does two and two make? I am afraid I shall make a poor clerk in future, I am spoiled with rambling among haycocks and cows and pigs. . . .

"Adieu! ye fields, ye shepherds and—herdesses, and dairies and cream-pots, and fairies and dances upon the green.

"I come, I come. Don't drag me so hard by the hair of my head, Genius of British India! I know my hour is come, Faustus must give up his soul, O Lucifer, O Mephistopheles!"

A very interesting letter from Lamb to Wordsworth, post-marked September 23rd, gives us much information: "It seems an age since we have corresponded, but indeed the interim has been stuffd out with more variety than usually checquers my same-seeming existence.—Mercy on me, what a traveller have I been since I wrote you last! what foreign wonders have been explored! I have seen Bath, King Bladud's ancient well, fair Bristol, seed-plot of suicidal Chatterton, Marlbro', Chippenham, Calne, famous for nothing in particular that I know of—but such a vertigo of locomotion has not seized us for years. We spent a month with the Morgans at the last named Borough—August—and such a change has the change wrought in us that we could not stomach wholesome Temple air, but are absolutely rusticating (O the gentility of it) at Dalston, about one mischievous boy's stone's throw off Kingsland Turnpike, one mile from Shoreditch church, thence we emanate in various directions to Hackney, Clapton, Totnam, and such like romantic country. That my lungs should ever prove so dainty as to fancy they perceive differences of air! but so it is, tho' I am almost ashamed of it. Like Milton's devil (turn'd truant to his old Brimstone) I am purging off the foul air of my once darling tobacco in this Eden, absolutely snuffing up pure gales, like old worn out Sin playing at being innocent, which never comes again, for in spite of good books and good thoughts there is something in a Pipe that virtue cannot give tho' she give her unendowed person for a dowry."

Lamb goes on to refer to a recent article on Coleridge by Hazlitt: "Have you read the review of Coleridge's character,

person, physiognomy &c. in the Examiner—his features even to his *nose*—O horrible license beyond the old Comedy. He is himself gone to the sea side with his favorite Apothecary, having left for publication as I hear a prodigious mass of composition for a Sermon to the middling ranks of people to persuade them they are not so distressed as is commonly supposed. Methinks he should recite it to a congregation of Bilston Colliers,—the fate of Cinna the Poet would instantaneously be his. God bless him, but certain that rogue-Examiner has beset him in most unmannerly strains. Yet there is a kind of respect shines thro' the disrespect that to those who know the rare compound (that is the subject of it) almost balances the reproof, but then those who know him but partially or at a distance are so extremely apt to drop the qualifying part thro' their fingers. . . . By the way, I have seen Colerge. but once this 3 or 4 months. He is an odd person: when he first comes to town he is quite hot upon visiting, and then he turns off and absolutely never comes at all, but seems to forget there are any such people in the world. I made one attempt to visit him (a morning call) at Highgate, but there was something in him or his apothecary which I found so unattractively-repulsing-from any temptation to call again, that I stay away as naturally as a Lover visits. The rogue gives you Love Powders, and then a strong horse drench to bring 'em off your stomach that they mayn't hurt you."

Hazlitt's article on Coleridge, in the *Examiner* of September 8th, 1816, took the form of a prospective notice of Coleridge's *Lay Sermon on the Distresses of the Country, addressed to the Middle and Higher Orders.* Here are a few sentences: "He is the dog in the manger of literature, an intellectual marplot, who will neither let anybody else come to a conclusion, nor come to one himself. . . . Two things are indispensable to him—to set out from no premises and to arrive at no conclusion. . . . His mind is in a constant state of flux and reflux; he is like the Sea Horse in the ocean; he is the man in the moon, the Wandering Jew. . . . Mr. Shandy would have settled the question at once:—'You have little or no nose, Sir.'"

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* has this reference to the article: "Dec. 21st, 1816 [at Gillman's]:—He [Coleridge] mentioned Hazlitt's attack with greater moderation than I expected. He complains, and with reason I think, of Lamb, who, he says, ought not to

admit a man into his house who abuses the confidence of private intercourse so scandalously. He denies H., however, originality, and ascribes to L. the best ideas in H.'s article.[1] He was not displeased to hear of his being knocked down by John Lamb lately."

And Crabb Robinson also has the following entry referring to the same matter as it was discussed at Lamb's: "We talked of Hazlitt's late ferocious attack on Coleridge, which Lamb thought fair enough, between the parties; but he was half angry with Martin Burney for asserting that the praise was greater than the abuse. 'Nobody,' said Lamb, 'will care about or understand the "taking up the deep pauses of conversation between Seraphs and Cardinals," but the satire will be universally felt. Such an article is like saluting a man, "Sir, you are the greatest man I ever saw," and then pulling him by the nose.'"

Lamb's letter to Wordsworth also has this passage: "Gifford (whom God curse) has persuaded squinting Murray (whom may God not bless) not to accede to an offer Field made for me to print 2 vols. of Essays, to include the one on Hog$^{rth}$. and 1 or 2 more, but most of the matter to be new, but I dare say I should never have found time to make them; M. would have had 'em, but shewed specimens from the Reflector to G—— as he acknowleged to Field, and Crispin did for me. 'Not on his soal but on his soul damn'd Jew' may the malediction of my eternal antipathy light." The collected edition of Lamb's essays and poems which Murray refused was, as we shall see, published by the Olliers in 1818. A little later Lamb tried to level up his account against Gifford by a sonnet (see Vol. II., page 6), wherein his early connection with shoemaking was again insisted upon, in a manner which even antagonists of otherwise refined minds permitted themselves in those days.

A letter from Mary Lamb to Sarah Hutchinson, in November, amplifies the story of the Dalston rustication. "We have passed ten, I may call them very good, weeks at Dalston, for they completely answered the purpose for which we went. Reckoning our

[1] We have seen Lamb's reference to Coleridge as an archangel a little damaged. In Hazlitt's article we read: "If he had had but common moral principle, that is, sincerity, he would have been a great man; nor hardly, as it is, appears to us—

Less than arch-angel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscur'd."

Hazlitt may have heard Lamb's epithet, backed probably by the same passage from *Paradise Lost*.

happy month at Calne we have had quite a rural summer and have obtained a very clear idea of the great benefit of quiet—of early hours and time intirely at ones own disposal, and no small advantages these things are, but the return to old friends, the sight of old familiar faces round me, has almost reconciled me to occasional headachs and fits of peevish weariness—even London streets, which I sometimes used to think it hard to be eternally doomed to walk through before I could see a green field, seem quite delightful.

"Charles smoked but one pipe while we were at Dalston and he has not transgressed much since his return. I hope he will only smoke now with his fellow-smokers which will give him five or six clear days in the week. . . . I have just been reading your kind letter over again and find you had some doubt whether we had left the Temple entirely. It was merely a lodging we took to recruit our health and spirits. From the time we left Calne Charles drooped sadly, company became quite irksome, and his anxious desire to leave off smoking and his utter inability to perform his daily resolutions against it became quite a torment to him, so I prevailed with him to try the experiment of change of scene and set out in one of the short stage coaches from Bishopsgate Street, Miss Brent and I, and we looked over all the little places within three miles and fixed on one quite countrified and not two miles from Shoreditch Church and entered upon it the next day. I thought if we stayed but a week it would be a little rest and respite from our troubles, and we made a ten weeks stay and very comfortable we were, so much so that if ever Charles is superannuated on a small pension, which is the great object of his ambition, and we felt our income straitened, I do think I could live in the country entirely; at least I thought so while I was there, but since I have been at home I wish to live and die in the Temple where I was born. We left the trees so green it looked like early autumn, and can see but one leaf 'The last of its clan' on our poor old Hare Court trees. What a rainy summer!—and yet I have been so much out of town and have made so much use of every fine day that I can hardly help thinking it has been a fine summer. We calculated we walked three hundred and fifty miles while we were in our country lodging. One thing I must tell you, Charles came round every morning to a shop near the Temple to get shaved.

"Last Sunday we had such a pleasant day I must tell you of it.

We went to Kew and saw the old Palace where the King was brought up, it was the pleasantest sight I ever saw, I can scarcely tell you why, but a charming old woman shewed it to us. She had lived twenty six years there and spoke with such a hearty love of our good old King, whom all the world seems to have forgotten, that it did me good to hear her. She was as proud in pointing out the plain furniture, (and I am sure you are now sitting in a larger and better furnished room) of a small room in which the King always dined, nay more proud of the simplicity of her royal master's taste, than any show-er of Carlton House can be in showing the fine things there, and so she was when she made us remark the smallness of one of the Princesses' bedrooms and said she slept and also dressed in that little room. There are a great many good pictures but I was most pleased with one of the King when he was about two years old, such a pretty little white-headed boy."

Crabb Robinson, who had spent his long vacation in the Lakes, has a few entries touching the Lambs at the end of the year:—

"November 2nd:—At ten o'clock I called on the Lambs. Burney was there, and we played a rubber, and afterwards Talfourd stepped in. We had a long chat together. We talked of puns, wit, &c. Lamb has no respect for any wit which turns on a serious thought. He positively declared that he thought his joke upon my 'great first cause, least understood,' a bad one, as well as the 'luke warm Christian' applied to Evans. On the other hand, he said, 'If you will quote any one of my jokes, quote this, which is really a good one. Hume and his wife and several of their children were with me. Hume repeated the old saying, "One fool makes many." "Ay, Mr. Hume," said [I,] pointing to the company, "you have a fine family."' Neither Talfourd nor I could see the excellence of this." Lamb went on to repeat Coleridge's joke, on Boyer's death, wishing his soul a journey to heaven borne by cherubs, all face and wing, and therefore "without anything to excite his whipping propensities."

"Nov. 12th:—Called late on Lamb. Morgan was with him. Lamb insisted on giving me the 4 Qº. volumes of Burke, which I accepted, because I knew he would not read the books himself and had already banished them his library. In return I made him take La Vierge au Linge, which I have sent to the frame maker to be made like La Vierge aux Rochers.

"Nov. 18th:—I took Miss Lamb with me to see Kean in 'Timon.'"

In 1816 Hazlitt's attitude of hostility to Wordsworth caused Robinson to cut him. They subsequently engaged in intercourse again, but for a while friendly relations wholly ceased. It was in this connection that Mary Lamb remarked to Robinson, "You are rich in friends. We cannot afford to cast off ours because they are not all we wish."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### 1817

Hazlitt and Wordsworth—A Visit to Brighton—Lamb's Thursday Evenings—Talfourd's Description—Procter's Description—Lamb's Way with His Guests—First Meeting with Procter—Thomas Love Peacock—Hazlitt's Account of a Thursday Evening—"Persons One would Wish to Have Seen"—Hazlitt's Quarrel with Lamb—Manning's Return—The Move to Great Russell Street—Coleridge's Plans—The Dinner at Haydon's—Lamb and Keats—Lamb and Shelley—Vincent Novello's Evenings—A Dinner Party.

IN 1817 Lamb wrote nothing that has been preserved beyond a few letters, the best of which is one in rhyme to William Ayrton, who had just produced Mozart's "Don Giovanni" at the Haymarket; while Crabb Robinson's *Diary* yields little of importance. The year is however notable in his life for the move from Inner Temple Lane.

I begin with a passage from the letter to Ayrton:—

I go to the play
In a very economical sort of a way,
Rather to see
Than be seen.
Though I'm no ill sight
Neither,
By candle-light,
And in some kinds of weather.
You might pit me
For height
Against Kean;
But in a grand tragic scene
I'm nothing:—
It would create a kind of loathing
To see me act Hamlet;
There'd be many a damn let
Fly
At my presumption
If I should try,
Being a fellow of no gumption,

This is Crabb Robinson's first entry :—

"January 29th, 1817 :—I called on Lamb. Mrs. Montagu and Miss Brent [Mrs. Morgan's sister] were there. The conversation was on Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge and Wordsworth [to which allusion has already been made]. Lamb spoke sharply in apology for H. and *at* me. He represented the praise of C. as an ample set off, and he thought both C. and W. had deserved this at his hands. At the same time he declared he had quarrelled with Hazlitt about it. He had sent the article against C. to W., who had written about it without feeling, and he had appeared to have been much affected with C. for not noticing as it deserved what L. had related to him about H. viz. : that when he sat down to write a critique on the *Excursion* he actually cried because he was disappointed and could not praise it as it deserved. To which C. gave no answer but by going on with the sentiment that the *Excursion* was a falling off. I saw no reason for this displeasure of L. I do not believe the fact that H. cried and I hardly think L. serious in his vindication of H. At least it is but a momentary feeling."

In April Robinson records that Miss Lamb is ill again, but on May 24th he writes : "I called on Lamb and was much gratified by finding Miss Lamb there. Both were looking remarkably well. They were also in good spirits. L. was warm in his praise of Southey's early poems and I took them home and read them in bed."

In the summer came a visit to Brighton with Mrs. Morgan. We have no information as to where they stayed, except that they had sight of the sea, but Mary Lamb tells Dorothy Wordsworth that she and her brother liked walking on the Downs, finding them almost as good as the Westmorland mountains.

In August Lamb sent to Barron Field, in New South Wales, the letter which he afterwards expanded into the *Elia* essay on "Distant Correspondents." It has this passage : "For my own history, I am just in the same spot, doing the same thing (videlicet, little or nothing) as when you left me ; only I have positive hopes that I shall be able to conquer that inveterate habit of smoking which you may remember I indulged in. I think of making a beginning this evening, viz., Sunday 31st Aug. 1817, not Wednesday, 2d Feb. 1818, as it will be perhaps when you read this for the first time."

Before, with the Lambs, we leave Inner Temple Lane for ever, I should like to quote one or two descriptions of Lamb's Thursday (late Wednesday) evenings, which, I fancy, were at their best in those rooms. Talfourd, Procter, Hazlitt and Hunt have all left impressions of the company and the conversation to be found there. I begin with Talfourd's account, which, accurate enough in spirit and generalities, is however here and there, as I shall show, a little loose in details: "Now turn to No. 4, Inner Temple Lane, at ten o'clock, when the sedater part of the company are assembled, and the happier stragglers are dropping in from the play. Let it be any autumn or winter month, when the fire is blazing steadily, and the clean-swept hearth and whist-tables speak of the spirit of Mrs. Battle, and serious looks require 'the rigor of the game.' The furniture is old-fashioned and worn; the ceiling low, and not wholly unstained by traces of 'the great plant,' though now virtuously forborne: but the Hogarths, in narrow black frames, abounding in infinite thought, humour and pathos, enrich the walls; and all things wear an air of comfort and hearty English welcome.

"Lamb himself, yet unrelaxed by the glass, is sitting with a sort of Quaker primness at the whist-table, the gentleness of his melancholy smile half lost in his intentness on the game; his partner [Godwin], the author of Political Justice, (the majestic expression of his large head not disturbed by disproportion of his comparatively diminutive stature,) is regarding his hand with a philosophic but not a careless eye; Captain Burney, only not venerable because so young in spirit, sits between them; and H. C. R. [Robinson], who alone now and then breaks the proper silence, to welcome some incoming guest, is his happy partner—true winner in the game of life, whose leisure achieved early, is devoted to his friends. At another table, just beyond the circle which extends from the fire, sit another four. The broad, burly, jovial bulk of John Lamb, the Ajax Telamon of the slender clerks of the old South Sea House, whom he sometimes introduces to the rooms of his younger brother, surprised to learn from them that he is growing famous, confronts the stately but courteous Alsager; while P. [Phillips], 'his few hairs bristling' at gentle objurgation, watches his partner M. B. [Martin Burney], dealing, with 'soul more white' than the hands of which Lamb once said, 'M., if dirt was trumps, what hands you would hold!' In one corner of the room, you may see the pale earnest countenance of Charles Lloyd, who is discoursing 'of

fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute,' with Leigh Hunt; and, if you choose to listen, you will scarcely know which most to admire —the severe logic of the melancholy reasoner, or its graceful evasion by the tricksome fantasy of the joyous poet. Basil Montagu, gentle enthusiast in the cause of humanity, which he has lived to see triumphant, is pouring into the outstretched ear of George Dyer some tale of legalised injustice, which the recipient is vainly endeavouring to comprehend. Soon the room fills; in *slouches* Hazlitt from the theatre, where his stubborn anger for Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo has been softened by Miss Stephens's angelic notes, which might 'chase anger, and grief, and fear, and sorrow, and pain from mortal or immortal minds;' Kenney, with a tremulous pleasure, announces that there is a crowded house to the ninth representation of his new comedy, of which Lamb lays down his cards to inquire; or Ayrton, mildly radiant, whispers the continual triumph of 'Don Giovanni,' for which Lamb, incapable of opera, is happy to take his word. Now and then an actor glances on us from 'the rich Cathay' of the world behind the scenes, with news of its brighter human-kind, and with looks reflecting the public favour—Liston, grave beneath the weight of the town's regards—or Miss Kelly, unexhausted in spirit by alternating the drolleries of high farce with the terrible pathos of melodrama,—or Charles Kemble mirrors the chivalry of thought, and ennobles the party by bending on them looks beaming with the aristocracy of nature.

"Meanwhile Becky lays the cloth on the side-table, under the direction of the most quiet, sensible, and kind of women—who soon compels the younger and more hungry of the guests to partake largely of the cold roast lamb or boiled beef, the heaps of smoking roasted potatoes, and the vast jug of porter, often replenished from the foaming pots, which the best tap of Fleet-street supplies. Perfect freedom prevails, save when the hospitable pressure of the mistress excuses excess; and perhaps, the physical enjoyment of the playgoer exhausted with pleasure, or of the author jaded with the labour of the brain, is not less than that of the guests at the most charming of aristocratic banquets. As the hot water and its accompaniments appear, and the severities of whist relax, the light of conversation thickens: Hazlitt, catching the influence of the spirit from which he has lately begun to abstain, utters some fine criticism with struggling emphasis; Lamb stam-

mers out puns suggestive of wisdom, for happy Barron Field to admire and echo; the various driblets of talk combine into a stream, while Miss Lamb moves gently about to see that each modest stranger is duly served; turning, now and then, an anxious loving eye on Charles, which is softened into a half humorous expression of resignation to inevitable fate, as he mixes his second tumbler!"

Talfourd's fine free way is only too well exemplified in the foregoing passage, which resembles one of the early Italian paintings of the life of a saint, in which all the deeds of his pilgrimage synchronise on the canvas. My meaning will be sufficiently plain when I say that Napoleon was defeated in 1815; Ayrton produced "Don Giovanni" in 1817; Barron Field left England for Australia in August, 1816; Charles Lloyd's second residence in London of any duration did not begin until 1818; Crabb Robinson's leisure, although achieved early, dated from 1828; and the Lambs left Inner Temple Lane in 1817. As a general impression, however, Talfourd's picture is probably accurate and certainly it has life and persuasiveness.

Procter fills in certain of the gaps. "When you went to Lamb's rooms on the Wednesday evenings, (his 'At Home,') you generally found the card table spread out, Lamb himself one of the players. On the corner of the table was a snuff-box; and the game was enlivened by sundry brief ejaculations and pungent questions, which kept alive the wits of the party present. It was not 'silent whist!'

"The supper of cold meat, on these occasions, was always on the side table; not very formal, as may be imagined; and every one might rise, when it suited him, and cut a slice or take a glass of porter, without reflecting on the abstinence of the rest of the company. Lamb would, perhaps, call out and bid the hungry guest help himself without ceremony. We learn (from Hazlitt) that Martin Burney's eulogies on books were sometimes intermingled with expressions of his satisfaction with the veal pie which employed him at the sideboard. After the game was won (and lost) the ring of the cheerful glasses announced that punch or brandy and water had become the order of the night.

"Politics were rarely discussed amongst them. Anecdotes, characteristic, showing the strong and weak points of human nature, were frequent enough. But politics (especially party

politics) were seldom admitted. Lamb disliked them as a theme for evening talk; he perhaps did not understand the subject scientifically. And when Hazlitt's impetuosity drove him, as it sometimes did, into fierce expressions on public affairs, these were usually received in silence; and the matter thus raised up for assent or controversy was allowed to drop."

Procter thus describes Lamb's conversational manner: "His speech was brief and pithy; not too often humorous; never sententious nor didactic. Although he sometimes talked whilst walking up and down the room, (at which time he seldom looked at the person with whom he was talking), he very often spoke as if impelled by the necessity of speaking—suddenly, precipitately. If he could have spoken very easily he might possibly have uttered long sentences, expositions, or orations; such as some of his friends indulged in, to the utter confusion of their hearers. But he knew the value of silence; and he knew that even truth may be damaged by too many words. When he did speak his words had a flavour in them beyond any that I have heard elsewhere. His conversation dwelt upon persons or things within his own recollection, or it opened (with a startling doubt, or a question, or a piece of quaint humour) the great circle of thought.

"In temper he was quick, but easily appeased. He never affected that exemption from sensibility, which has sometimes been mistaken for philosophy; and has conferred reputation upon little men. In a word, he exhibited his emotions in a fine, simple, natural manner. Contrary to the usual habits of wits, no retort or reply by Lamb, however smart in character, ever gave pain. . . . Lamb's dissent was very intelligible, but never superfluously demonstrative: often, indeed, expressed by his countenance only: sometimes merely by silence."

Procter also remarks, "It was curious to observe the gradations in Lamb's manner to his various guests; although it was courteous to all. With Hazlitt he talked as though they met the subject in discussion on equal terms; with Leigh Hunt he exchanged repartees; to Wordsworth he was almost respectful; with Coleridge he was sometimes jocose, sometimes deferring; with Martin Burney fraternally familiar; with Manning affectionate; with Godwin merely courteous, or if friendly, then in a minor degree." To this analysis it is necessary only to add that Lamb is said once to have pulled Wordsworth's nose, and at

Haydon's to have addressed him as "You rascally old Lake poet."

Bryan Waller Procter (Barry Cornwall) tells us in his *Autobiographical Fragment* that he first met Lamb in 1817 at Hunt's house. In that year the author of *Charles Lamb: A Memoir*, to which all who write of Lamb are so much indebted, was thirty. He was in business as a solicitor; was living a very gay life as a man about town, keeping his hunter and taking lessons from Tom Cribb; and contributing to the *Literary Gazette*. There is no doubt but that intercourse with Lamb, who seems to have liked him extremely, led to his thinking more seriously of poetry, and we may attribute the composition of his *Dramatic Scenes* largely to Lamb's influence. Lamb admired them a little perhaps beyond their deserts, possibly from this paternal association; he said that they were worthy of a place in his *Specimens*. It was not, however, until *Marcian Colonna*, 1820, and *A Sicilian Story*, 1821, were published, that Procter took his place as one of the poets of the day.

Procter tells us that on the evening at Hunt's when he first met Lamb he made the acquaintance also of Hazlitt, Walter Coulson and Thomas Love Peacock. I can find no other evidence that Lamb and Peacock ever met; but they certainly ought to have known each other, especially after 1819, when Peacock entered the Examiner's Office of the East India House. Sir Algernon West in his Reminiscences attributes to Lamb—I think wrongly—a condensed version of Peacock's lines, as given by his granddaughter in her memoir of him in Bentley's edition, on the India House routine:—

> From ten to eleven, ate a breakfast for seven;
> From eleven to noon, to begin 'twas too soon;
> From twelve to one, asked "What's to *be* done?"
> From one to two, found nothing to do;
> From two to three, began to foresee
> That from three to four would be a d——d bore.[1]

The author of *Headlong Hall* should have found much in common with the author of *Elia;* but I am not aware that he did so. Perhaps Peacock's friend Shelley came between; for, as

[1] There is a story, but I cannot give a reference for it, of Lamb and Peacock sitting opposite each other at a public dinner. Between them was a salad bowl, on the top of which was a hard-boiled egg. "What kind of egg is that?" Peacock asked. "The kind of egg," replied Lamb, "that a drunken peacock would lay."

we are about to see, Shelley was one of Lamb's "imperfect sympathies,"—or rather antipathies.

To return to Lamb's evening parties, there is more stuff of the intellect in Hazlitt's essay "On the Conversation of Authors" in *The Plain Speaker*, a description which, for the most part, however, belongs to an earlier period than that which we have now reached—about 1814 I think—but which may be fittingly taken here. "But when a set of adepts, of *illuminati*, get about a question, it is worth while to hear them talk. They may snarl and quarrel over it, like dogs; but they pick it bare to the bone, they masticate it thoroughly. This was the case formerly at L[amb]'s—where we used to have many lively skirmishes at their Thursday evening parties. I doubt whether the Small-coal man's musical parties could exceed them. Oh! for the pen of John Buncle to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory!—

"There was L—— himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hair-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors! 'And, in our flowing cups, many a good name and true was freshly remembered.' Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set—Milton and Shakspeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch Novels had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author of the *Rambler* was only tolerated in Boswell's *Life* of him; and it was as much as any one could do to edge in a word for *Junius*. L—— could not bear *Gil Blas*. This was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph

I ever had was in persuading him, after some years' difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett. On one occasion, he was for making out a list of persons famous in history that one would wish to see again—at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus—but we black-balled most of his list! But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne, or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious!* He tried them on his palate as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most—as in saying that the display of the sumptuous banquet in *Paradise Regained* was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger—and stating that Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for C[oleridge] to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him: nor were his sweets or his sours ever diluted with one particle of affectation.

"I cannot say that the party at L——'s were all of one description. There were honorary members, lay-brothers. Wit and good fellowship was the motto inscribed over the door. When a stranger came in, it was not asked, 'Has he written anything?'—we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. If a person liked anything, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand, by analogy, the pungency of other things besides Irish blackguard or Scotch rappee. A character was good anywhere, in a room or on paper. But we abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen. There was one of our party who never failed to mark 'two for his Nob' at cribbage, and he was thought no mean person. This was Ned P[hillips], and a better fellow in his way breathes not. There was ——, who asserted some incredible matter of fact as a likely paradox, and settled all controversies by an *ipse dixit*, a *fiat* of his will, hammering out many a hard theory on the anvil of his brain—the Baron Munchausen of politics and practical philosophy:—there was Captain B[urney], who had you at an advantage by never understanding you:—there was Jem White, the Author of *Falstaff's Letters*, who the other day left this dull world to go in search of more kindred spirits, 'turning like the latter end of a lover's lute:'—

there was A[yrton], who sometimes dropped in, the Will Honeycomb of our set—and Mrs. R[eynolds], who being of a quiet turn, loved to hear a noisy debate. An utterly uninformed person might have supposed this a scene of vulgar confusion and uproar. While the most critical question was pending, while the most difficult problem in philosophy was solving, P—— cried out, 'That's game,' and M. B. muttered a quotation over the last remains of a veal-pie at a side table."

Summing up the character of the best talker he had known, Hazlitt says, in the same essay: "Wordsworth sometimes talks like a man inspired on subjects of poetry (his own out of the question)—Coleridge well on every subject, and Godwin on none. To finish this subject—Mrs. M[ontagu]'s conversation is as fine-cut as her features, and I like to sit in the room with that sort of coronet face. What she says leaves a flavour, like fine green tea. H[unt]'s is like champagne, and N[orthcote]'s like anchovy sandwiches. H[aydon]'s is like a game at trap-ball: L——'s like snap-dragon: and my own (if I do not mistake the matter) is not very much unlike a game at nine-pins!"

Hazlitt has left not only this description of a Thursday evening, but also a report of one of the informal discussions. He suggests that it occurred very early in his acquaintance with Lamb; but I fancy his memory betrayed him, and the real time was about 1814. The subject, suggested by Lamb, was "Persons One would Wish to Have Seen."

"On the question being started, A[yrton] said, 'I suppose the two first persons you would choose to see would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr. Locke?' In this A——, as usual, reckoned without his host. Every one burst out a-laughing at the expression of Lamb's face, in which impatience was restrained by courtesy. 'Yes, the greatest names,' he stammered out hastily, 'but they were not persons—not persons.'—'Not persons?' said A——, looking wise and foolish at the same time, afraid his triumph might be premature. 'That is,' rejoined Lamb, 'not characters, you know. By Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton you mean the "Essay on the Human Understanding" and the "Principia," which we have to this day. Beyond their contents there is nothing personally interesting in the men. But what we want to see any one *bodily* for, is when there is something peculiar, striking in the individuals, more than

we can learn from their writings, and yet are curious to know. I dare say Locke and Newton were very like Kneller's portraits of them. But who could paint Shakspeare?'—'Ay,' retorted A——, 'there it is; then I suppose you would prefer seeing him and Milton instead?'—'No,' said Lamb, 'neither. I have seen so much of Shakspeare on the stage and on book-stalls, in frontispieces and on mantel-pieces, that I am quite tired of the everlasting repetition: and as to Milton's face, the impressions that have come down to us of it I do not like; it is too starched and puritanical; and I should be afraid of losing some of the manna of his poetry in the leaven of his countenance and the precisian's band and gown.'—'I shall guess no more,' said A——. 'Who is it, then, you would like to see "in his habit as he lived," if you had your choice of the whole range of English literature?'

"Lamb then named Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, as the two worthies whom he should feel the greatest pleasure to encounter on the floor of his apartment in their nightgown and slippers, and to exchange friendly greeting with them. At this A—— laughed outright, and conceived Lamb was jesting with him; but as no one followed his example, he thought there might be something in it, and waited for an explanation in a state of whimsical suspense. Lamb then . . . went on as follows:—'The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is, that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the soothsayers of old, who dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal but themselves, I should suppose, can fathom. There is Dr. Johnson: I have no curiosity, no strange uncertainty about him; he and Boswell together have pretty well let me into the secret of what passed through his mind. He and other writers like him are sufficiently explicit: my friends, whose repose I should be tempted to disturb (were it in my power), are implicit, inextricable, inscrutable. When I look at that obscure but gorgeous prose composition, the "Urn-burial," I seem to myself to look into a deep abyss, at the bottom of which are hid pearls and rich treasure; or it is like a stately labyrinth of doubt and withering speculation, and I would invoke the spirit of the author to lead me through it. Besides, who would not be curious to see the lineaments of a man who, having himself been twice married,

wished that mankind were propagated like trees! As to Fulke Greville, he is like nothing but one of his own "Prologues spoken by the ghost of an old king of Ormus," a truly formidable and inviting personage: his style is apocalyptical, cabalistical, a knot worthy of such an apparition to untie; and for the unravelling a passage or two, I would stand the brunt of an encounter with so portentous a commentator!'—

"'I am afraid, in that case,' said A——, 'that if the mystery were once cleared up, the merit might be lost;'—and turning to me, whispered a friendly apprehension, that while Lamb continued to admire these old crabbed authors, he would never become a popular writer. Dr. Donne was mentioned as a writer of the same period, with a very interesting countenance, whose history was singular, and whose meaning was often quite as *uncomeatable*, without a personal citation from the dead, as that of any of his contemporaries. . . .

"Some one then inquired of Lamb if we could not see from the window the Temple walk in which Chaucer used to take his exercise; and on his name being put to the vote, I was pleased to find that there was a general sensation in his favour in all but A——, who said something about the ruggedness of the metre, and even objected to the quaintness of the orthography. I was vexed at this superficial gloss, pertinaciously reducing everything to its own trite level, and asked 'if he did not think it would be worth while to scan the eye that had first greeted the Muse in that dim twilight and early dawn of English literature; to see the head round which the visions of fancy must have played like gleams of inspiration or a sudden glory; to watch those lips that "lisped in numbers, for the numbers came"—as by a miracle, or as if the dumb should speak? Nor was it alone that he had been the first to tune his native tongue (however imperfectly to modern ears); but he was himself a noble, manly character, standing before his age and striving to advance it; a pleasant humorist withal, who has not only handed down to us the living manners of his time, but had, no doubt, store of curious and quaint devices, and would make as hearty a companion as mine host of the Tabard. His interview with Petrarch is fraught with interest. Yet I would rather have seen Chaucer in company with the author of the "Decameron," and have heard them exchange their best stories together—the "Squire's Tale" against

the "Story of the Falcon," the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" against the "Adventures of Friar Albert." How fine to see the high mysterious brow which learning then wore, relieved by the gay, familiar tone of men of the world, and by the courtesies of genius! Surely, the thoughts and feelings which passed through the minds of these great revivers of learning, these Cadmuses who sowed the teeth of letters, must have stamped an expression on their features as different from the moderns as their books, and well worth the perusal. Dante,' I continued, 'is as interesting a person as his own Ugolino, one whose lineaments curiosity would as eagerly devour in order to penetrate his spirit, and the only one of the Italian poets I should care much to see. There is a fine portrait of Ariosto by no less a hand than Titian's; light, Moorish, spirited, but not answering our idea. The same artist's large colossal profile of Peter Aretine is the only likeness of the kind that has the effect of conversing with "the mighty dead;" and this is truly spectral, ghastly, necromantic.'

"Lamb put it to me if I should like to see Spenser as well as Chaucer; and I answered, without hesitation, 'No; for that his beauties were ideal, visionary, not palpable or personal, and therefore connected with less curiosity about the man. His poetry was the essence of romance, a very halo round the bright orb of fancy; and the bringing in the individual might dissolve the charm. No tones of voice could come up to the mellifluous cadence of his verse; no form but of a winged angel could vie with the airy shapes he has described. He was (to my apprehension) rather a "creature of the element, that lived in the rainbow and played in the plighted clouds," than an ordinary mortal. Or if he did appear, I should wish it to be as a mere vision, like one of his own pageants, and that he should pass by unquestioned like a dream or sound—

——'*That* was Arion crown'd:
So went he playing on the wat'ry plain.'

"Captain Burney muttered something about Columbus, and Martin Burney hinted at the Wandering Jew; but the last was set aside as spurious, and the first made over to the New World.

"'I should like,' said Mrs. Reynolds, 'to have seen Pope talk with Patty Blount; and I *have* seen Goldsmith.' Every one turned round to look at Mrs. Reynolds, as if by so doing they could get a sight at Goldsmith. . . .

"'I thought,' said A——, turning short round upon Lamb, 'that you of the Lake School did not like Pope?'—'Not like Pope! My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever!'—'Why, certainly, the "Essay on Man" must be allowed to be a masterpiece.'—'It may be so, but I seldom look into it.'—'Oh! then it's his Satires you admire?'—'No, not his Satires, but his friendly Epistles and his compliments.'—'Compliments! I did not know he ever made any.'—'The finest,' said Lamb, 'that were ever paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life—nay, is an immortality. There is that superb one to Lord Cornbury:

> Despise low joys, low gains;
> Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
> Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains.'

Was there ever more artful insinuation of idolatrous praise? And then that noble apotheosis of his friend Lord Mansfield (however little deserved), when, speaking of the House of Lords, he adds—

> 'Conspicuous scene! another yet is nigh,
> (More silent far) where kings and poets lie;
> Where Murray (long enough his country's pride)
> Shall be no more than Tully or than Hyde!'

And with what a fine turn of indignant flattery he addresses Lord Bolingbroke—

> 'Why rail they then, if but one wreath of mine,
> Oh! all-accomplish'd St. John, deck thy shrine?'

Or turn,' continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek and his eye glistening, 'to his list of early friends:

> 'But why then publish? Granville the polite,
> And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;
> Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,
> And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays:
> The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,
> Ev'n mitred Rochester would nod the head;
> And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
> Received with open arms one poet more.
> Happy my studies, if by these approved!
> Happier their author, if by these beloved!
> From these the world will judge of men and books,
> Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks.'

Here his voice totally failed him, and throwing down the book, he said, 'Do you think I would not wish to have been friends with such a man as this?'

"'What say you to Dryden?'—'He rather made a show of himself, and courted popularity in that lowest temple of fame, a coffee-shop, so as in some measure to vulgarise one's idea of him. Pope, on the contrary, reached the very *beau ideal* of what a poet's life should be; and his fame while living seemed to be an emanation from that which was to circle his name after death. He was so far enviable (and one would feel proud to have witnessed the rare spectacle in him) that he was almost the only poet and man of genius who met with his reward on this side of the tomb, who realised in friends, fortune, the esteem of the world, the most sanguine hopes of a youthful ambition, and who found that sort of patronage from the great during his lifetime which they would be thought anxious to bestow upon him after his death. Read Gay's verses to him on his supposed return from Greece, after his translation of Homer was finished, and say if you would not gladly join the bright procession that welcomed him home, or see it once more land at Whitehall stairs.'—'Still,' said Mrs. Reynolds, 'I would rather have seen him talking with Patty Blount, or riding by in a coronet-coach with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu!'

"Erasmus Phillips, who was deep in a game of piquet at the other end of the room, whispered to Martin Burney to ask if Junius would not be a fit person to invoke from the dead. 'Yes,' said Lamb, 'provided he would agree to lay aside his mask.'

"We were now at a stand for a short time, when Fielding was mentioned as a candidate: only one, however, seconded the proposition. 'Richardson?'—'By all means, but only to look at him through the glass-door of his back-shop, hard at work upon one of his novels (the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works); not to let him come behind his counter, lest he should want you to turn customer, or to go upstairs with him, lest he should offer to read the first manuscript of "Sir Charles Grandison," which was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that "Joseph Andrews" was low.'

"There was but one statesman in the whole of English history that any one expressed the least desire to see—Oliver Cromwell, with his fine, frank, rough, pimply face, and wily policy; and one enthusiast, John Bunyan, the immortal author of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' It seemed that if he came into the room, dreams would follow him, and that each person would nod under his golden cloud,

'nigh-sphered in heaven;' a canopy as strange and stately as any in Homer.

"Of all persons near our own time, Garrick's name was received with the greatest enthusiasm, who was proposed by Barron Field. He presently superseded both Hogarth and Handel, who had been talked of, but then it was on condition that he should act in tragedy and comedy, in the play and the farce, 'Lear' and 'Wildair' and 'Abel Drugger.' What a *sight for sore eyes* that would be! . . .

"We were interrupted . . . by a grumbler in a corner, who declared it was a shame to make all this rout about a mere player and farce-writer, to the neglect and exclusion of the fine old dramatists, the contemporaries and rivals of Shakspeare. Lamb said he had anticipated this objection when he had named the author of 'Mustapha' and 'Alaham;' and, out of caprice, insisted upon keeping him to represent the set, in preference to the wild, hare-brained enthusiast, Kit Marlowe; to the sexton of St. Ann's, Webster, with his melancholy yew-trees and death's-heads; to Decker, who was but a garrulous proser; to the voluminous Heywood; and even to Beaumont and Fletcher, whom we might offend by complimenting the wrong author on their joint productions. Lord Brooke, on the contrary, stood quite by himself, or, in Cowley's words, was 'a vast species alone.' Some one hinted at the circumstance of his being a lord, which rather startled Lamb, but he said a *ghost* would perhaps dispense with strict etiquette, on being regularly addressed by his title. Ben Jonson divided our suffrages pretty equally. Some were afraid he would begin to traduce Shakspeare, who was not present to defend himself. 'If he grows disagreeable,' it was whispered aloud, 'there is Godwin can match him.' At length his romantic visit to Drummond of Hawthornden was mentioned, and turned the scale in his favour.

"Lamb inquired if there was any one that was hanged that I would choose to mention. And I answered, 'Eugene Aram.' . . .

"'But shall we have nothing to say?' interrogated G. J——, 'to the "Legend of Good Women"?'—'Name, name, Mr. J——, cried Hunt in a boisterous tone of friendly exultation, 'name as many as you please, without reserve or fear of molestation!' J—— was perplexed between so many amiable recollections, that the name of the lady of his choice expired in a pensive whiff of

his pipe; and Lamb impatiently declared for the Duchess of Newcastle. Mrs. Hutchinson was no sooner mentioned, than she carried the day from the Duchess. We were the less solicitous on this subject of filling up the posthumous lists of Good Women, as there was already one in the room as good, as sensible, and in all respects as exemplary as the best of them could be for their lives! 'I should like vastly to have seen Ninon de l'Enclos,' said that incomparable person [meaning Mary Lamb]; and this immediately put us in mind that we had neglected to pay honour due to our friends on the other side of the Channel: Voltaire, the patriarch of levity, and Rousseau, the father of sentiment; Montaigne and Rabelais (great in wisdom and in wit); Molière and that illustrious group that are collected round him (in the print of that subject) to hear him read his comedy of the 'Tartuffe' at the house of Ninon; Racine, La Fontaine, Rochefoucauld, St. Evremont, &c.

"'There is one person,' said a shrill, querulous voice, 'I would rather see than all these—Don Quixote!'

"'Come, come!' said Hunt; 'I thought we should have no heroes, real or fabulous. What say you, Mr. Lamb? Are you for eking out your shadowy list with such names as Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Tamerlane, or Ghengis Khan?'—'Excuse me,' said Lamb; 'on the subject of characters in active life, plotters and disturbers of the world, I have a crotchet of my own, which I beg leave to reserve.'—'No, no! come out with your worthies!'—'What do you think of Guy Fawkes and Judas Iscariot?' Hunt turned an eye upon him like a wild Indian, but cordial and full of smothered glee. 'Your most exquisite reason!' was echoed on all sides; and A—— thought that Lamb had now fairly entangled himself. 'Why, I cannot but think,' retorted he of the wistful countenance, 'that Guy Fawkes, that poor, fluttering annual scarecrow of straw and rags, is an ill-used gentleman. I would give something to see him sitting pale and emaciated, surrounded by his matches and his barrels of gunpowder, and expecting the moment that was to transport him to Paradise for his heroic self-devotion; but if I say any more, there is that fellow Godwin will make something of it. And as to Judas Iscariot, my reason is different. I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray Him. I have no conception of

such a thing; nor have I ever seen any picture (not even Leonardo's very fine one) that gave me the least idea of it.'—'You have said enough, Mr. Lamb, to justify your choice.'

"'Oh! ever right, Menenius,—ever right!'

"'There is only one other person I can ever think of after this,' continued Lamb; but without mentioning a name that once put on a semblance of mortality. 'If Shakspeare was to come into the room, we should all rise up to meet him; but if that person was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment!'"

Robinson tells us above that Lamb had quarrelled with Hazlitt. From what we know of the matter it would be more correct to say that Hazlitt had quarrelled with Lamb, his cause of complaint being that on one of Wordsworth's visits to town Hazlitt was not included in Lamb's invitations to meet the poet. Lamb was acting rather upon Wordsworth's wishes than his own, but Wordsworth probably had sufficient reason, into which it is not necessary to enter here. It is enough to say that Hazlitt, as he grew older, did not grow more tolerant or less suspicious, and his friendship became more and more difficult to retain. That his feeling against Lamb was, however, tempered with justice, we know from the dedication of his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, published in 1817:—

To

CHARLES LAMB, ESQ.,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED AS A MARK OF

OLD FRIENDSHIP

AND LASTING ESTEEM

BY THE AUTHOR.

In 1820 there are signs that Hazlitt was again resentful. This new period of soreness against Lamb lasted until the end of 1823, when they were fully reconciled.

The Lambs moved to Great Russell Street in 1817, driven from the Temple by the state of their rooms. In a letter to the Kenneys is the suggestion that the departure was decided upon suddenly in October, while they were in their Dalston retreat.

The other news in the letter is that Manning has returned. "He expressed sòme mortifications at not finding Mrs. Kenney in England. He looks a good deal sunburnt, and is got a little reserved, but I hope it will wear off." Manning had come back

to England a disappointed man, and thenceforward was to become more and more peculiar and anti-social. His adventures in the East, though curious, had yielded very little result. From 1807 to 1810 his headquarters had been the East India Company's factory at Canton, where he practised as a doctor and occasionally made journeys into the interior of the country. In 1810 he was at Calcutta, whence he succeeded in accomplishing the journey to Lhassa, the sacred city in the storming of which so many other explorers failed. Manning was the first Englishman to enter it, and he remained there for some months before he was conveyed back to India. The story will be found in his journal, published in 1876, with a memoir, by the Royal Geographical Society. Manning then returned to Canton, and after joining Lord Amherst's mission to Pekin as interpreter, he sailed in 1816 for England. The vessel was wrecked near Sunda in February, 1817, and in the following July the passengers were taken to St. Helena, where Manning again met Napoleon and reminded him of their previous meeting, in 1803, when Manning had been granted the only passport given to an Englishman in Paris. In the autumn of 1817 he once more reappeared in England, the richer by some curious Asiatic lore and a long and luxuriant beard to which he was devotedly attached.

Barry Cornwall, who first met Manning at this time, writes as follows in his Memoir of Lamb: "When the Chinese traveller returned to London, he was very often a guest at Lamb's residence. I have repeatedly met him there. His countenance was that of an intelligent, steady, almost serious man. His journey to the celestial empire had not been unfruitful of good; his talk at all times being full of curious information, including much anecdote, and some (not common) speculations on men and things. When he returned, he brought with him a native of China, whom he took one evening to a ball in London; where the foreigner from Shanghai, or Pekin, enquired with much naïveté as to the amount of money which his host had given to the dancers for their evening's performance, and was persuaded with difficulty that their exertions were entirely gratuitous. Manning had a curious habit of bringing with him (in his waistcoat pocket) some pods of the red pepper, whenever he expected to partake of a meal. His original intention (as I understood) when he set out for China, was to frame and publish a Chinese and English

dictionary; yet—although he brought over much material for the purpose—his purpose was never carried into effect." Now and again we have a further glimpse of Manning; but of the remainder of his life very little is known. He died in 1840. No portrait of him exists.

In October came the move. The Lambs left the Temple, which except for slight intervals had been their home all their lives, never to return to it. They moved to Great Russell Street, to rooms on the first floor, over Mr. Owen, an ironmonger, the tenant both of No. 21 and 20, the corner house and the house next to it. The numbering of the street is still the same, but the houses have been rebuilt and altered, and what was Mr. Owen's is now two fruit shops. Lamb gives his address as No. 20, but it is definitely stated by Barry Cornwall that they lived over the corner shop—which until lately was a ham and beef shop and was once Will's Coffee House.[1] According to George Daniel, the antiquary, Lamb's Russell Street rooms were reached by a narrow winding pair of stairs. Great Russell Street then extended from Covent Garden to Brydges Street (now Catherine Street), where it became Little Russell Street. It is now all Russell Street from Covent Garden to Drury Lane. At No. 19 was Barker's, the second-hand bookseller, where Lamb bought the folio Beaumont and Fletcher which is mentioned in the essay "Old China" in Chapter XV. and is now in the British Museum. Covent Garden Theatre was at the back of them, Drury Lane diagonally just across the way.

Writing to Dorothy Wordsworth on November 21st, 1817, Lamb says: "Here we are, transplanted from our native soil. I thought we never could have been torn up from the Temple. Indeed it was an ugly wrench, but like a tooth now 'tis out and I am easy. We never can strike root so deep in any other ground. This, where we are, is a light bit of gardener's mold, and if they take us up from it, it will cost no blood and groans like mandrakes pull'd up. We are in the individual spot I like best in all this great city. The theatres with all [their noises. Covent Garden] dearer to me than any gardens of Alcinous, where we are morally sure of the earliest peas and 'sparagus. Bow Street, where the thieves are examined, within a few yards of us. Mary had not

[1] Crabb Robinson writes to his brother Thomas on December 23rd of this year: "Let his Turkey be directed minutely to Mr. Lamb at Mr. Owen's, No. 20 and 21, Great Russell Street, Drury Lane."

BOW STREET AND COVENT GARDEN THEATRE IN LAMB'S DAY

FROM *ACKERMANN'S REPOSITORY OF ARTS*

been here four and twenty hours before she saw a Thief. She sits at the window working, and casually throwing out her eyes, she sees a concourse of people coming this way, with a constable to conduct the solemnity. These little incidents agreeably diversify a female life." But the best thing in the letter is the reference to De Quincey's marriage—at least I think Lamb must mean De Quincey: "It is a delicate subject, but is Mr. * * * really married? and has he found a gargle to his mind? O how funny he did talk to me about her, in terms of such mild quiet whispering speculative profligacy. But did the animalcule and she crawl over the rubric together, or did they not?"

In the same letter, which is a double one, Mary Lamb says: "Charles has had all his Hogarths bound in a book, they were sent home yesterday, and now that I have them altogether and perceive the advantage of peeping close at them through my spectacles I am reconciled to the loss of them hanging round the room, which has been a great mortification to me—in vain I tried to console myself with looking at our new chairs and carpets, for we have got new chairs, and carpets covering all over our two sitting rooms."

The letter continuing tells us that the 1817 holiday was spent at Brighton: at least I think it impossible that by "last summer" Mary Lamb could mean that of 1816, because we know that the full month was then spent at Calne and thereabouts: "I missed my old friends and could not be comforted—then I would resolve to learn to look out of the window, a habit I never could attain in my life, and I have given it up as a thing quite impracticable —yet when I was at Brighton last summer the first week I never took my eyes off from the sea, not even to look in a book. I had not seen the sea for sixteen years. Mrs. Morgan, who was with us, kept her liking and continued her seat in the window till the very last, while Charles and I played truant and wandered among the hills, which we magnified into little mountains and *almost as good as* Westmoreland scenery—certainly we made discoveries of many pleasant walks which few of the Brighton visitors have ever dreamed of—for, like as is the case in the neighbourhood of London, after the first two or three miles we were sure to find ourselves in a perfect solitude. I hope we shall meet before the walking faculties of either of us fail. You say you can walk fifteen miles with ease, that is exactly my stint, and more fatigues me."

On December 10th Lamb writes to John Payne Collier asking him to interest himself in Coleridge's new plan to lecture on Shakespeare and Poetry. Coleridge is in bad health and "unless something is done to lighten his mind he will soon be reduced to his extremities. . . . He projects a new course, not of physic, nor of metaphysic, nor a new course of life, but a new course of lectures on Shakspeare and Poetry. There is no man better qualified (always excepting number one); but I am pre-engaged for a series of dissertations on India and India-pendence, to be completed at the expense of the Company, in I know not (yet) how many volumes foolscap folio. I am busy getting up my Hindoo mythology; and for the purpose I am once more enduring Southey's curse. To be serious, Coleridge's state and affairs make me so; and there are particular reasons just now, and have been any time for the last twenty years, why he should succeed." To these lectures we shall come in 1818.

On December 27th Robinson has the following entry :—

"December 27th :—I called on Lamb, and met Wordsworth with him; I afterwards returned to Lamb's. Dined at Monkhouse's. The party was small—Mr. and Mrs. Wordsworth and Miss Hutchinson, Coleridge and his son Hartley, and Mr. Tillbrook. After dinner Charles Lamb and his son [a slip of the pen for sister] joined the party." Tillbrook, of Cambridge, a friend of Wordsworth, was tutor to Clarkson's son.

On the next night Lamb went to another party and made it historic—the party at Haydon's. Haydon was then living at Lisson Grove. The guests were Wordsworth, Monkhouse, Lamb, Keats, Ritchie, Landseer, and the unfortunate Comptroller of Stamps, a Mr. Kingston. This is Haydon's account of the evening: "On December 28th the immortal dinner came off in my painting-room, with Jerusalem towering up behind us as a background. Wordsworth was in fine cue, and we had a glorious set-to,—on Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Virgil. Lamb got exceedingly merry and exquisitely witty; and his fun in the midst of Wordsworth's solemn intonations of oratory was like the sarcasm and wit of the fool in the intervals of Lear's passion. He made a speech and voted me absent, and made them drink my health. 'Now,' said Lamb, 'you old lake poet, you rascally poet, why do you call Voltaire dull?' We all defended Wordsworth, and affirmed there was a state of mind when Voltaire would be

dull. 'Well,' said Lamb, 'here's Voltaire—the Messiah of the French nation, and a very proper one too.'

"He then, in a strain of humour beyond description, abused me for putting Newton's head into my picture,—'a fellow,' said he, 'who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle.' And then he and Keats agreed he had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours. It was impossible to resist him, and we all drank 'Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics.' It was delightful to see the good-humour of Wordsworth in giving in to all our frolics without affectation and laughing as heartily as the best of us.

"By this time other friends joined, amongst them poor Ritchie who was going to penetrate by Fezzan to Timbuctoo. I introduced him to all as 'a gentleman going to Africa.' Lamb seemed to take no notice; but all of a sudden he roared out, 'Which is the gentleman we are going to lose?' We then drank the victim's health, in which Ritchie joined.

"In the morning of this delightful day, a gentleman, a perfect stranger, had called on me. He said he knew my friends, had an enthusiasm for Wordsworth and begged I would procure him the happiness of an introduction. He told me he was a comptroller of stamps, and often had correspondence with the poet. I thought it a liberty; but still, as he seemed a gentleman, I told him he might come.

"When we retired to tea we found the comptroller. In introducing him to Wordsworth I forgot to say who he was. After a little time the comptroller looked down, looked up and said to Wordsworth, 'Don't you think, sir, Milton was a great genius?' Keats looked at me, Wordsworth looked at the comptroller. Lamb who was dozing by the fire turned round and said, 'Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?' 'No, sir; I asked Mr. Wordsworth if he were not.' 'Oh,' said Lamb, 'then you are a silly fellow.' 'Charles! my dear Charles!' said Wordsworth; but Lamb, perfectly innocent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire.

"After an awful pause the comptroller said, 'Don't you think Newton a great genius?' I could not stand it any longer. Keats put his head into my books. Ritchie squeezed in a laugh. Wordsworth seemed asking himself, 'Who is this?' Lamb got up, and taking a candle, said, 'Sir, will you allow me to look at

your phrenological development?' He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the comptroller he chaunted—

'Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his breeches on.'

The man in office, finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in a spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory, 'I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth.' 'With me, sir?' said Wordsworth, 'not that I remember.' 'Don't you, sir? I am a comptroller of stamps.' There was a dead silence;—the comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out

'Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle.'

'My dear Charles!' said Wordsworth,—

'Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John,'

chaunted Lamb, and then rising, exclaimed, 'Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs.' Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting-room, shut the door and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back, but the comptroller was irreconcilable. We soothed and smiled and asked him to supper. He stayed, though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man, we parted all in good humour, and no ill effects followed.

"All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting-room and calling at intervals, 'Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more.'

"It was indeed an immortal evening. Wordsworth's fine intonation as he quoted Milton and Virgil, Keats's eager inspired look, Lamb's quaint sparkle of lambent humour, so speeded the stream of conversation, that in my life I never passed a more delightful time. All our fun was within bounds. Not a word passed that an apostle might not have listened to. It was a night worthy of the Elizabethan age, and my solemn Jerusalem flashing up by the flame of the fire, with Christ hanging over us like a vision, all made up a picture which will long glow upon—

'that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.'

Keats made Ritchie promise he would carry his Endymion to the great desert of Sahara and fling it in the midst.

"Poor Ritchie went to Africa, and died, as Lamb foresaw, in 1819. Keats died in 1821, at Rome. C. Lamb is gone, joking to the last. Monkhouse is dead, and Wordsworth and I are the only two now living (1841) of that glorious party."

Haydon's great night was one of the few occasions on which Lamb and Keats met. Mrs. Cowden Clarke, in a description of the musical evenings at Vincent Novello's, mentions "Keats, with his picturesque head, leaning against the instruments, one foot raised on his knee and smoothed beneath his hands; Leigh Hunt, with his jet-black hair and expressive mouth; Shelley, with his poet's eyes and brown curls; and Lamb with his spare figure and earnest face;" but I doubt if all this company was ever together. Lamb told Bernard Barton some years later that he had met Shelley but once, and that very likely was at Godwin's.

Lamb admired Keats's poetry, as we know by his review of "St. Agnes' Eve" in the *New Times*, and by the statement to Robinson that he thought it "next to Wordsworth;" but the man himself cannot greatly have attracted him, nor was Keats drawn to Lamb. He mentions in one of his letters meeting Lamb at Novello's and being devastated and excruciated by bad and repeated puns. From what we know of Lamb we can see how likely he would be to break in indecorously upon what he considered a period of too intense worship of sound, just as he could not resist the impulse to leaven the rigours of a funeral. Writing to his brother George, on September 17th, 1819, Keats remarks, "The thought of your little girl puts me in mind of a thing I heard Mr. Lamb say. A child in arms was passing by his chair towards the mother in the nurse's arms. Lamb took hold of the long clothes, saying, 'Where, God bless me, where does it leave off!'" On another occasion, in an undated letter to Benjamin Bailey, Keats mentions calling upon Lamb; but we cannot rightly place the poet on the roll of Lamb's friends.

Shelley we know Lamb actively to have disliked; he objected to his voice and he ignored all his poetry ("thin sown with aught of profit or delight" he quoted of it) except "Rosalind and Helen," and the lines to a reviewer, which appealed to him by their humorous or unexpected turn. On the other hand Shelley admired Lamb deeply. He wrote to Leigh Hunt in 1819:

"What a lovely thing is his *Rosamond Gray!* How much knowledge of the sweetest and deepest parts of our nature in it! When I think of such a mind as Lamb's—when I see how unnoticed remain things of such exquisite and complete perfection what should I hope for myself, if I had not higher objects in view than fame!"—a criticism that pleased Lamb when Hunt repeated it to him. Again, writing to Hunt in the same year, Shelley said, "Of Lamb you know my opinion, and you can bear witness to the regret which I felt when I learned that the calumny of an enemy had deprived me of his society whilst in England."

To what Shelley refers I have not discovered (the second Mrs. Godwin with lurid tales of her step-son-in-law's emotional history comes to one's mind); yet it is difficult to believe that under any conditions Lamb would ever have cared for Shelley. The two men were curiously different. Lamb kept ever very near the earth; Shelley was all fire and air. Lamb's sole desire was to remain naturally and quietly among facts as they were; Shelley, essentially in revolt, continually nourished revolutionary ideals. Lamb moved patiently between his lodgings and his office; Shelley rushed, all impatience, from one beautiful country to another. It is doubtful, as I have said, if under any circumstances the two ever would have been friends; but considering his knowledge of the human heart and his sympathy with religious questionings Lamb's prejudiced attitude to Shelley was extreme, and his comment on Shelley's death in the letter to Barton of October 9th, 1822, shows him, I think, in perhaps his least admirable moment.

With Mrs. Shelley, the poet's widow and Godwin's daughter, he remained, however, on good terms to the end. Talfourd remarks that Lamb "made some amends for his indifference to Shelley, by his admiration of Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which he thought the most extraordinary realisation of the idea of a being out of nature which had ever been effected."

Vincent Novello, the organist, composer, and founder of the publishing business that bears his name, was the son of an Italian father and an English mother, and was born in 1781. He was thus by six years Lamb's junior, although one perhaps thinks of him rather as his elder. He married, in 1808, Mary Sabilla Hehl, the daughter of a German father and an English mother, and they had eleven children, one of whom, Clara

Anastasia, now the Countess Gigliucci, is still living. Her sister, Mary Sabilla Novello, died as recently as 1904. It is to Mary Victoria, the eldest daughter, who married Charles Cowden Clarke, and who survived until 1892, that we owe our principal knowledge of Vincent Novello and of the family's intercourse with the Lambs. At what date this intercourse began I cannot exactly state, but I think it probable that Leigh Hunt, a close friend of Novello, first took Lamb to 240 Oxford Street somewhen about 1816. That Novello admired the Lambs' writings we know from Mrs. Cowden Clarke's account, in her memoir of her father, of his reading aloud the *Tales from Shakespear* to her as a child.

Novello's drawing-room on Sunday evening became as recognised a place of meeting as Lamb's sitting-room on Wednesdays and Thursdays, but while whist attracted Lamb's friends it was music that brought Novello's together. Lamb has given a glimpse of Novello at the organ in his "Chapter on Ears": "Something like this 'SCENE-TURNING' I have experienced at the evening parties, at the house of my good Catholic friend *Nov*——; who, by the aid of a capital organ, himself the most finished of players, converts his drawing-room into a chapel, his week days into Sundays, and these latter into minor heavens.[1]

"When my friend commences upon one of those solemn anthems, which peradventure struck upon my heedless ear, rambling in the side aisles of the dim abbey, some five and thirty years since, waking a new sense, and putting a soul of old religion into my young apprehension—(whether it be *that*, in which the psalmist, weary of the persecutions of bad men, wisheth to himself dove's wings—or *that other*, which, with a like measure of sobriety and pathos, inquireth by what means the young man shall best cleanse his mind)—a holy calm pervadeth me.—I am for the time

> ——— rapt above earth,
> And possess joys not promised at my birth.

"But when this master of the spell, not content to have laid a soul prostrate, goes on, in his power, to inflict more bliss than lies in her capacity to receive,—impatient to overcome her 'earthly' with his 'heavenly,'—still pouring in, for protracted

[1] I have been there, and still would go;
'Tis like a little heaven below.—*Dr. Watts.*

hours, fresh waves and fresh from the sea of sound, or from that inexhausted *German* ocean, above which, in triumphant progress, dolphin-seated, ride those Arions *Haydn* and *Mozart*, with their attendant tritons, *Bach*, *Beethoven*, and a countless tribe, whom to attempt to reckon up would but plunge me again in the deeps,—I stagger under the weight of harmony, reeling to and fro at my wit's end;—clouds, as of frankincense, oppress me—priests, altars, censers, dazzle before me—the genius of *his* religion hath me in her toils—a shadowy triple tiara invests the brow of my friend, late so naked, so ingenuous—he is Pope,—and by him sits, like as in the anomaly of dreams, a she-Pope too,—tri-coroneted like himself!—I am converted, and yet a Protestant;—at once *malleus hereticorum*, and myself grand heresiarch: or three heresies centre in my person: I am Marcion, Ebion, and Cerinthus—Gog and Magog—what not?—till the coming in of the friendly supper-tray dissipates the figment, and a draught of true Lutheran beer (in which chiefly my friend shows himself no bigot) at once reconciles me to the rationalities of a purer faith; and restores to me the genuine unterrifying aspects of my pleasant-countenanced host and hostess." (Lamb's testimony to the recuperative effects of beer is borne out by Edmund Ollier, son of the publisher of his *Works*, who tells us of another musical evening when Lamb "weathered a Mozartian storm" only with the assistance of a foaming mug.)

Novello, in spite of his estranging fidelity to an art beyond Lamb's reach, had much in common with his friend. His daughter tells us that among his dramatic idols were Miss Kelly, Elliston, Munden, Bannister and Liston, and that his admiration of Mrs. Jordan had amounted to a young man's enamoured fancy—recollections of "her laugh, her exquisite laugh," moved him to the highest enthusiasm. Here Lamb would be wholly with him. Again, he was steeped in Shakespeare, and once played Falstaff in a private performance of "Henry IV.;" and he liked puns and nonsense. Vincent Novello survived Lamb nearly twenty-seven years. He died in 1861; and a window to his memory was erected in the North transept of Westminster Abbey in 1863.

To Victoria Novello, Mrs. Cowden Clarke, we shall come later, for she was but a child of eight in 1817, yet there is in her *Recollections of Writers* a little glimpse of Lamb among chil-

dren which may be quoted here, as it belongs to this period. Lamb had carried to the Novello nursery a jar of preserved ginger. "Long did the remembrance remain in the family of that delicious rarity, and of the mode in which 'Mr. Lamb' stalked up and down the passage with a mysterious harbingering look and stride, muttering something that sounded like conjuration, holding the precious jar under his arm and feigning to have found it stowed away in a dark chimney somewhere near."

(In Sir Henry Taylor's correspondence is a letter from Miss Kate Perry, daughter of James Perry of the *Morning Chronicle*, containing another account of Lamb with children, with whom, on the infrequent occasions when he met them, he seems to have had a fascinating grave way. "My furthest back recollection," says Miss Perry, "is of his [Lamb's] playing blind man's buff with me and my sisters, in the long room of the Hermitage, where he entered privately, telling us 'not to mention it to the old people on the other side of the house,' with whom he played a solemn game of whist afterwards. This occurred when he lived with his poor sister during one of *her attacks*, at a little cottage of Mr. Bentley's." Mr. Bentley was the guardian of Miss Perry and her sister. His property was, I believe, near Rochester, and on it was the little cottage whither Mary Lamb was occasionally sent.) It is only right, however, to add that Lamb could whimsically take another view of "playthings for an hour." A story is told of him, after he had been much plagued by a noisy family, rising to propose the health of the "m-m-much ca-calumniated good King Herod."

It was the habit of the Novellos, the Hunts and the Lambs to entertain each other's circle in rotation, the only refreshment, by mutual agreement, being bread and cheese, and celery and beer, Lutheran or otherwise. Mrs. Cowden Clarke tells also of "meetings at the theatre, when Munden, Dowton, Liston, Bannister, Elliston and Fanny Kelly were on the stage; and picnic repasts enjoyed together by appointment in the fields that then lay spread in green breadth and luxuriance between the West-end of Oxford Street and the western slope of Hampstead Hill."[1]

[1] Another friend of the Novellos of whom there is no record in Lamb's letters, but whom I should like to think Lamb knew and esteemed, was John Nyren, the cricketer, the author (Charles Cowden Clarke assisting) of *The Young Cricketer's Tutor*, 1833, a book informed by a gusto that only Lamb or Hazlitt could fully appreciate or surpass. Nyren, like Novello, was a Roman Catholic and a man of position and taste, although I fear that the popular impression is that he was an illiterate cricketer incapable of recording his own memories.

Crabb Robinson's *Diary* winds up the year:—

"December 30th, 1817:—I dined with the Colliers, and spent the evening at Lamb's. I found a large party collected round the two poets, but Coleridge had the larger body. There was, however, scarcely any conversation beyond a whisper. Coleridge was philosophizing in his rambling way to Monkhouse, who listened attentively,—to Manning, who sometimes smiled, as if he thought Coleridge had no right to metaphysicize on chemistry without any knowledge on the subject,—to Martin Burney, who was eager to interpose,—and Alsager, who was content to be a listener; while Wordsworth was for a great part of the time engaged tête-à-tête with Talfourd. I could catch scarcely anything of the conversation. But I heard at one time Coleridge quoting Wordsworth's verses, and W. quoting *not* Coleridge's but his own. I chatted with the ladies. Miss Lamb had gone through the fatigue of a dinner-party very well, and C. Lamb was good-humoured. His object of attack was Martin Burney, who was in very good spirits. His uncle Dr. Charles Burney had died on Sunday, and C. L. protested Martin had eaten enormously on account of his grief."

END OF VOL. I.

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